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An adventure in orthodoxy



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THE OLD FAITH IN THE NEW DAY
THE CONTEMPORARY CHRIST

AN ADVENTURE IN ORTHODOXY

By
JOSEPH M. M. GRAY



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PREFACE

ONE of the happiest contributions to the discussion gathering around the present conflict of conservatism and radicalism was that made by Mrs. Katherine Fullerton Gerould in an essay on "The Æsthetics of Conservatism."¹ In it she remarked that the conservative always goes under, but conservatism always remains alive; the reason being that radicalism is a gesture of attack, which is always ugly, while conservatism is a gesture of defense, which is always graceful and pleasing. "The conserving attitude is an attitude of love—though it may hit upon the wrong things to love; while the radical mood is . . . a mood of hatred—though it may hit on the right things to hate."

The author of the present unassuming volume counts himself among those who are called progressive because of their attitude toward religion in its relation to modern science, and its practical application to the social order. But he has seemed to observe in some of his comrades of progress a tendency to disregard those durable realities of thought and experience which the discipline of Time has confirmed but

¹ The Atlantic Monthly, July, 1922.

PREFACE

has not exhausted, and without which conservatism and radicalism alike can be but words in the air. It is in the hope of helping in some way, however small, to maintain that sound appreciation of the conservative spirit, so necessary if progressivism is not to lose balance or direction, that he has committed to print the chapters which follow.

The references in footnotes serve to indicate not, as might be supposed, a parade of bibliography quite out of place in such a volume, but simply that the requirements of the copyright law have been met; which could not otherwise have been done except by sacrificing the stimulus to be gotten from contact with other minds through direct quotation.

J. M. M. G.

Elm Park Parsonage,
Scranton, Pennsylvania.

116:84
60:3

CHAPTER I

THE COMMONWEALTH VERSUS CHRISTIANITY

I

SINCE the pistol shot at Sarajevo we have been searching for a name with which to label our tumultuous day. To call it an age of transition would doubtless be accurate, but it would not be distinctive, for every age is an age of transition. Even those which seem to be undisturbed and quiet are constantly modified by unrecorded fermentations of thought, unconfessed gropings of faith, unpublished expansions of curiosity. In the years which lie immediately behind us the energies of change were present and effective. Looking back upon the period just preceding 1914, we seem to see it as a time of placid and happy monotony. The last lands hitherto unknown had been opened to common knowledge. Forbidden Tibet had been entered, railroads were penetrating the jungles of Africa and, crossing Siberian wastes, had put a girdle around the globe. Intrepid men had won the long battle with the arctic regions, and past the ice-bound

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graves of their predecessors who had failed, had marched to the conquest of the poles, International associations for peace, symbolized in the Hague Tribunal, with their enthusiasm, their fine contacts, their prophetic optimism, solemnly assured us that the last great military conflict had been fought. In a word, exploration and war, two of the great, if not the greatest, historic occasions of social change, had been removed. The organized life of men had been set into permanent molds. Civilization was now a sure and definite order. Education, politics, industry, religion were clearly projected. There would be modifications as time passed, modifications wrought by new knowledge and the progress of experience, but they would be additions to a determined order, the character of which and, broadly speaking, the course of which, were fixed. So men thought, and where they did not reach so clearly discriminated a conclusion, so they felt. It is thus, quiet, comfortable, undisturbed, those years seem now to have been, as we look back upon them across even so short a distance as a decade, cut sharply off by the gigantic chasm of the war.

But we know now that those dull-looking years, though we did not at the time suspect it, were alive with the most productive ener-

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gies. We know that underneath their quiet surface tumultuous and terrible things were generating and that the day in which we live is not an epoch isolated from all that has gone before it, but is the flower and fruitage of transitions which were then inexorably proceeding. Men and women pursued their common ways of custom, thinking small thoughts, living small lives, satisfied with the immediate and unawakened toward the future, while Columbus sailed to the discovery of a new world, while gunpowder was undermining the feudalism of a thousand years, while Wycliffe and Hus and a hundred other unremembered heroes were preparing for the Luther who was to be, while the extravagances of kings and the miseries of serfs were kindling the flame that consumed the French Empire. So men and women pursued their common ways of custom, thinking small thoughts, living small lives, satisfied with the immediate and unawakened toward the future, while philosophies, diplomacies, industries, racial hates and age-long injustices were seething toward the catastrophe of 1914. The energies of change may ferment unperceived, but the result cannot be hid. Soon or late it rises above the surface of experience and vision, a blossom or a burst, a development or a revolution. After the dull years, there buds

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and flowers the magnificence of the Renaissance with new worlds discovered, new ideals disclosed, new liberties attempted, new creations of the human spirit. After the tedium of sterile churchmanship sweeps in the Reformation with its rebirth of faith, its impulse to independence, its beginnings of nationality, its tragedies and hopes. After the deadly monotones of arrogance, extravagance, and misery, explode the splendor and the terror of the French Revolution. After the serene and comfortable years to which we look back, comes the day in which we now are living, with intellectual outlooks as significant as the Renaissance, with spiritual implications as vital as the Reformation, with political and social changes as productive and perilous as the French Revolution.

To fix upon a single word with which to capture and express the characteristic meaning and quality of our age is impossible. What Henry van Dyke, writing twenty-five years ago, said of the generation to which he was addressing himself, can be applied equally well to our day. "From the material side we might call it an age of progress; from the intellectual side, an age of science; from the medical side, an age of hysteria; from the political side, an age of democracy; from the commercial side, an

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age of advertisement; from the social side, an age of publicomania.”¹ Even then the full meaning of the times would not be expressed. But from whatever side one views it, or with how inadequate an observation, there is no aspect of it with which religion has not to do. From every area and interest of the day religion is being challenged, criticized, threatened, explored, so that one might very accurately suggest the concern of religion with contemporary life in the phraseology of the courts, *The Commonwealth versus Christianity*.

This is without doubt the most deep-lying and important feature of the present age. It is saturated with religious interest. It is vibrant with religious reactions. It is “eager for the things by which men live.” But it is seriously and painfully confused in respect of religion and religious values. Among several reasons, one surely is that we are too close to our own time to see it and its events in proper perspective. One may stand in front of a frail and mean cabin a few feet high and be unable to see the mountain to which it clings, sloping up to the enduring snows. We are standing so close to our human structures, our institutions and machines and books and wars,

¹ Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company from Van Dyke: *Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, p. 6.

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that we easily miss the ranges of eternal reality which rise beyond. Edward Mortimer Chapman has written of the historian Froude and his keen interest in religion and ethics, that he always saw the pillar of cloud and fire so near as to find himself either befogged or daunted—which will describe a multitude of earnest men and women to-day as they try to take account of the age and the changes which seem to threaten religion.

Of course, when one speaks of religion in this wise, it is Christianity which is involved. One of the more profound comments of recent times, quite contrary to much of the inference drawn from the lately developed comparative study of religions, reminds us that Christianity is not *a* religion, but that it is religion itself. It has to do with all life because it is the stuff of life. A remark like that indicates very sharply and unmistakably the position and function of the church. The church must react to life, not to be conformed to it but to be intelligible to it. The church's language must change with the changing speech of men. Its institutions must alter to meet the altering occasions of a living world. But it is religion, itself unchanged, which, through the church's changing channels, must reach, refresh, regenerate the life of man. There is perhaps no finer expression of this

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truth than in Tennyson's description of the Lady of the Lake. He is describing the gate to the city of Camelot, of which there was no gate like it under heaven:

"For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretched under all the cornice and upheld."

It is a picture, as one of the most penetrating of students has said, of the power of religion sustaining the structure of society. The church's forms are always changing and flowing like water, but its arms are stretched out immovable, like the cross.

Reading this allegory of Tennyson's, or thinking of religion in any other terms, we have to be very careful rightly to discriminate the significance of the church as the organized form of religion. There is a consoling appeal in this conception of its immovable arms underneath the fabric of society and life, but the essential note is not that of immobility but that of sustaining power. Its value lies in its serviceableness, not its rigidity; and it is from that point of view that serious minds must look out—and, indeed, are looking out—upon the present day, to discern the characteristic forces

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and conditions amid which religion and the church are called to serve.

It goes without saying that different minds, observing the contemporary scene, will not reach immediate unanimity in their discrimination of its essential and prominent features. Across the experience and thinking of our time have swept the illuminating disclosures of an amazing scientific advance, the passions of expanding democracy, the calculated tumult of discontented industrialism, the agonies of the greatest war of history, and the wistful emotions of innumerable broken hearts attempting to pierce the veil between the living and the dead. The measure and the manner of one's reaction to any or all of these influences will determine his characterization of the times. But, allowing for wide range of difference in this personal reaction, some few factors of the present day may be confidently affirmed as representative and characteristic of the conditions with which religion has to deal.

II

It is preeminently a day of revolt. Those years before the war, quiet, comfortable, undisturbed as they appear to us in retrospect, were alive with insurrections against the stated order of the past, though we do not appreciate

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the fact at full value. Life has been so bludgeoned by the war that our minds hardly pass it in their search for the sources of present ills or interests; but it is to be remembered that the war did not begin, *de novo*, an original human order. It interrupted, on the one hand, and accelerated, on the other, processes which were active long before 1914. It was long before the war that the spirit of revolt asserted itself in literature with free verse and the drama of the younger Russians; in music, with the innovations of Debussy and his radical contemporaries; in art, with the Cubists, who have given way to more and more extravagant expressionists as the years have passed. It was long before 1914 that the voices of protest against the social and industrial order grew from isolated and suspected criticism into an unmistakable chorus of indictment. Men not past middle life can barely remember when the presence of a single very modest and, according to the standards of to-day, very conservative volume on socialism seemed to cast a sinister shadow over a bookcase, and was regarded as a dangerous and irreligious thing. That is a long way back from the present time in which our shelves are crowded with volumes beside which such frightening predecessors would be as sheep among wolves. It was long before

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1914 that the solid bulwarks of orthodox theology rebuilt largely of materials quarried from "Paradise Lost," began to feel the assault of questioning and rebellious minds. In an ancient century the Latin scholars erected a particular theology in order to support and reinforce the temporal authority of the church. The Reformation, repudiating the claims of the church, clung to the theology in which those claims had found their most effective support. The Reformers, transferring their allegiance from a continuously inspired church to a verbally inspired Bible, carried on the ancient tradition of fixed creed, an inexorable God, irresponsible miracle. Puritanism built that tradition into government, Methodism organized it into life and wove it into song. The form has changed but the substance has been strangely constant, and it was long before the war that the liberal revolt against that elder tradition began to be effective.

Across those years, so yeasty underneath their placid surface, the war broke with its release of impulses hitherto suppressed by custom, its destruction of old restraints, its disregard of old conventions. Politically it has brought us revolutionary Russia, an Asia kindling to conflagration, and in America a discontent which ranges from constructive

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reform to the vehemence of anarchy. Socially it has given us the coarseness, the irreverence, the extravagance, the egoism of a generation which would sacrifice protective order for insecure freedom, and the refinements which hitherto have given life its charm for the indulgence of undisciplined, and not infrequently disastrous, self-expression.

To-day is also a day of Naturalism. The sense of the supernatural which subdued and sustained a former generation has very largely passed. This, of course, is a direct result of the disclosures of natural science as they have ceased to be the property of specialists and have become, through education and popular literature, the possession of the common mind. "The great revolutionary task of nineteenth-century thinkers, to speak it briefly, was to put man into nature. The great task of twentieth-century thinkers is to get him out again."² Yesterday men encouraged and maintained themselves amid the bewilderments of experience by a well-nigh universal and always comfortable belief in Divine Providence, but to-day the iron reign of law has seemed to disestablish Providence and enthrone an unnamed Fate, as, "blind to good and evil, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way." The

² Sherman, *Contemporary Literature*, p. 10. Henry Holt and Company.

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Puritans, Macaulay has told us, were sure that legions of ministering angels had charge over them, that on their slightest actions the spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest, and that events which politicians ascribed to earthly causes had, in fact, been ordained on their account. The modern man puts his trust in white corpuscles, complexes, and vitamins. No one will deny that the present attitude toward nature is quite different from that of an elder day when the outward order was to every man, as has been said of Bishop Berkeley, the ceaseless speech of God to his heart.

A third feature of the present time which cannot escape observation is the expansion of human and humane interest toward the social unity of the world, the contemporary humanitarianism which expresses the kinship of humanity across all national and racial barriers. Ever since the beginnings of easy and immediate communication the social unity of humankind has been increasingly emphasized, but never was that unity so inclusively recognized as it is to-day. A few years ago it was sufficient to remark the close relationship of markets—observing that drought on South-American grazing lands raised the price of American shoes, and that good crops in Kansas made

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bread cheaper to England's mill hands. To-day one must go farther than such simple commercial contacts. There are the unifying fellowships of science which know no nationality, and the common aims of labor as registered in the Internationale. There was the recent association of many nations in the war against the Central Powers; and there remains the comradeship of agony in the areas swept by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. There remains also the comradeship of help in which unbroken peoples join. No nation now stands alone amid the enterprise of life; and no idea, ideal, prosperity, reform, or purpose can be maintained unrelated to and unmodified by these inescapable unities of the world.

With these factors of the present time, and others unnamed, one further characteristic of the day must be carried in mind. It is the pessimism which marks so effective a portion of our living and formative interests. The generation before us was a generation of hope. Its optimism was not wholly well founded, as the years have lately demonstrated, but it was no less real and distinctive. The nobler aspects of the theory of evolution engendered the belief that the movements of life were invariably progressive and, regardless of individual choices, the thoughts of men were widened with

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the process of the suns as they raced from heaven to heaven. The impulses to liberty, brotherhood, and equality, released by the American struggle for independence and flung around the world by the French Revolution, carried down the years the conviction of social progress as certain as that forecast by science. The conviction was further reinforced by the traditional religious hope of the kingdom of God. Men and women still felt something of the jubilant anticipations of those times

“In which the meager, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance.”

The contrast between that and the present mood is almost absolute. One searches almost, if not altogether, in vain, through current literature and thought for any note of optimism. In philosophy there are Professor Dewey's materialism and the hopeless atheism of Bertrand Russell. In history one meets recurrently the economic interpretation with its sordid premises and its stupid conclusions. In biography Lytton Strachey has set a new standard of cleverness in a mode which discovers the inspiration of General Gordon to have been drink and drugs, and writes down Florence Nightingale as a querulous and conceited

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busybody. Contemporary criticism flowers in the anonymous judgments of authors whose courage is in concealment and who can find nothing to admire in the public men upon whom have rested the immeasurable responsibilities of the day. In fiction our generation seem to drag out a drab and sordid spectacle of meanness, futility, and sex. It is almost the mode to declare that international finance purposely brought on the war for the benefit of profiteers; that there was nothing of high purpose, nothing of fine spirit, nothing of that sacrificial passion in the common men who fought and died in it which hitherto have always wrought some sacramental splendor for the ideal. Progress, justice, peace, civilization itself, all are proclaimed but dreams with which humanity has deceived itself within the iron imprisonments of necessity. Lieutenant-Colonel Repington tells of an American officer who said that he was reading a history of the future, and then produced a history of the Middle Ages; which reminds one of an acute remark of Richard Jefferies to the effect that of all the inventions of casuistry with which man has manacled himself, none is so powerful as the supposition that nothing more is possible.

The spirit of revolt, the inexorability of nature, the expansion of human interest to

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approximate the unity of humankind, the pessimism which corrodes the very strength of life—these are distinguishable factors in present-day experience and apprehension. There are doubtless others, bulking more or less largely, according to the temperament and outlook of the individual. But all offer no new problem to the mind or heart of man; they simply state the old questions in new terms. Amid them we stand, as our forbears have stood amid whatever were the facts in which they found themselves involved. Like them, we meet the immemorial inquiry from within, not essentially affected by the circumstances without, as to life's meaning, its direction, its destiny.

Few travelers crossing the Atlantic for the first time but have discovered themselves face to face, soon or late, with those lofty and searching introspections which the sense of the illimitable sea inspires. The author recalls very clearly a midnight when, during wartime, he stood alone on the deck of a liner in midocean under a moonless sky. The stars were dim, and around the vessel only the faintest of faint lights hovered. The sea rolled past in long, majestic swells, and from time to time could be heard, unseen, the splash of breaking waves. Through the dull light the lines of a ship could

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barely be discerned amid the convoy which the perils of the war made necessary. The bridge on which, by day the captain stood, for the moment was empty. Overhead was the blackness of the midnight sky, the dim stars hardly lighting it, and all around, through the countless miles of gloom, was Matthew Arnold's "unplumbed, salt, estranging sea." One thought instinctively of what was ahead; and who knew? War raging on the continent to which the ship was bound; submarines haunting the waters through which it was to pass; storms hurrying down from what icebound fastnesses of the north; the pitiless, insatiable ocean beating at the vessel's bow and flinging thunders with the spray that flashed across her head! What were they doing on the other ships just glimpsed across the night? What experiences were waiting on the other side? Where was the captain and who was steering us across the deep? What of the men and women, the children, left behind, whose thoughts and prayers were following the ship? And one man, at least, thought of his father's and his mother's graves; and what does this little human life of ours involve and mean, with its holocausts of war, its majestic heroisms, its pathos of separation, its splendors of sacrifice?

So a man standing on the lonely deck of a

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ship that plunges through a moaning ocean under a midnight sky illumined dimly by the stars, is an allegory of our world of men swinging across the expanse of time. Events may change as the years pass; customs may be altered, knowledge widened, courage strengthened, superstitions dissolved amid the light of science; but around the men of every generation Time rolls its magic and its mystery. Over them extend the impenetrable amplitudes of star and space, around them the enigma of their comrades in the same bewildered voyage of life. Behind them is the pathos of a thousand buried generations; before them the awesome silence of the bourne from which no man has yet returned. And deep speaking unto deep still asks the age-old questions: Whence do we come? Whither do we go? What means this little life of man?

III

In other words, amid the changes of a changing world, the needs of men are unaltered. Because in a very vital fashion men themselves remain unaltered. We speak commonly of how time changes us; and to look at a man of seventy-five while remembering what he was a half a century before is to be sadly reminded

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of the tragedy of change. But what is essentially us does not change, regardless of the years. There is a realm of experience, intelligence, emotion, and will in which the man of twenty-five and the man of a half a century later are one. We remember. Personal identity endures; and while the body breaks, the black hair bleaches to silver, the ears grow dull and only faintly hear the noise and music of the world, the eyes grow dim and only vaguely see the moving panorama of association and the printed page the man within, unchanged amid his crumbling tenement, abides. And with that durable identity there remains the reality of his "needs that no man can meet." The great experiences of human life fall upon all men, regardless of their times and places, their knowledge or their power. Theirs alike is the mystery of pain, the urge of labor that ends in weariness and of success whose goal is discontent. Theirs alike are the cruelty of disillusionment and those recurrent disappointments which wither confidence and sap the springs of courage. Theirs alike are the scourge of sin and the cleansing streams of pity and of terror. Theirs are the glory of love and the bitterness of sorrow and the bewilderment of the grave. Theirs the endless interrogation of life itself forever finding, though

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not always phrasing its discovery, that eternity is set in its heart.

So also, notwithstanding the efflorescence of revolt which marks the present day as it has recurred within groups of insurrection in every generation, within the deeps of human experience, both individual and social, the sense of obligation remains insistent upon men, whatever changes may transform the face and forms of life. The philosopher Kant, looking in wonder at the starry heavens above him, found the magnificence of the universe without answered by the majesty of the moral order that spoke within. So does every man in those solemn moments of meditation and insight which, infrequently or often, come to every one. In childhood's dawn, in the fair morning of youth, in the glory of young manhood's ideals and aspirations, in maturity's high noon, when premonitions of decay begin to cast their slender shadows across the road of life, in the dusks of age that brood swiftly into night, the voice of obligation speaks in tones always appropriate to the listening spirit, and speaks the one serene, inescapable appeal. And amid their needs, under this imperious sense of duty, men want "neither to be soothed by orthodoxies nor to be excited by heterodoxies, but to . . . listen to the honest recital of what the

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mind has found, what conclusions it has reached, what ideas have best stood the great vital test, the fears that have been clouds, and the hopes that have been favoring winds, in the adventurous voyage of time.”³

There are also permanences other than the needs of men and their sense of obligation. With them, and amid the changes wrought by drab or tragic time, there remains the instinct of the human heart for God. It is not to be questioned that there are voices raised to-day, as in every generation, loud, commanding, insidious voices, denying in the name of philosophy and reason, in the name of experience and progress, the existence or even the desirability of God; but the vehemence of their denial witnesses to the strength of the conviction they would dislodge. It has been simply but truly said that the word “God” contains the remedial secret for all our vast human need; and notwithstanding the protests of denial which shrill like thin, despairing winds from waste lands where no man comes, the great voice of humanity attests its incorrigible instinct for a living God. It is of God that nature, for all its mechanisms, still reminds men; his reality that kindles in the red

³ Gordon, *Aspects of the Infinite Mystery*, p. 5. Houghton Mifflin Company.

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of dawn, that glows in the radiance of the summer sky, that rides upon the tempest and marshals a hundred pageants in the procession of the seasons. It is the unexpressed conviction of God which makes possible our nobler human hopes and impels the best of whatever may be our adventures of intelligence and affection. It is this conviction of God which, unexplained yet uneluded "makes men eager to live yet nobly curious to die." It may be that the anecdote has no foundation in fact which describes Napoleon as interrupting a discussion of atheism among his officers by pointing to the brilliance of the Syrian sky and asking, "Gentlemen, who made all that?" It is quite possible that modern astronomical knowledge would suggest an answer to Napoleon entirely out of the range of the simple theological or religious setting in which he conceived the question. But the question itself can never be lifted from the more intimate experience of men. What lives behind our life? What urges our spiritual quest? Though perhaps we know the history of the forms of the visible universe, nevertheless the mystery remains as to the origin of the fact. Whose voice is this that speaks to an inner self the sense of duty, the indictment of sin, the glory of hope, the invitation of the infinite, declaring

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that the world without is too small for the soul within? The instinct for God remains amid illimitable change.

There remains also the historic Christ. It is not necessary at this point to give him any theological meaning or to refer to the definitions written in the great metaphysical creeds. One need not be reminded of the luminous figure of faith and affection to which nineteen hundred years of Christian worship have given peculiar sanctity. It is enough simply to recall that from the least Christian and from the most un-theological consideration of the human Jesus, he still remains the most dynamic fact of history; the simple record of the three short years of his active life having done more, as Lecky wrote, "to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and all the exhortations of moralists." A historian like H. G. Wells resolves to write of Jesus, with the most scrupulous care to treat him as a man, so that if, as he says, the light of divinity should shine through his narrative, the historian would neither have helped nor hindered it. He so writes, baldly, cynically at times, yet his pages redisclose how the name of Jesus, as Emerson put it, is plowed into the history of the world. Every generation has made mention of the darkness which it has found obscuring the path

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of human progress in those nobler ascents of the spirit which alone justify the struggle of the flesh and mind. But every generation, seen in true perspective, confirms the truth that "the light that has come to us through two thousand years is . . . from Calvary."⁴

It is but illustrating this to remark that the historic Christ remains "the externalized conscience of the race." Regardless of their most divergent attitudes toward the Bible, the church, revealed religion, and Christian theology, men judge the quality and urge the claims of their best social purposes by an appeal to the sanctions of Christ as discoverable in his words and example; while it is not a matter for argument but of experience that no man comes face to face, honestly, with the historic Jesus and remains indifferent. As a Swiss theologian described his own experience, Christ makes a silence in the heart. Studied, continually reexamined, the Scriptures which portray his life subjected to the most relentless criticism, through centuries of experiment, through wars and atheisms, through betrayals by his friends and misunderstandings of his enemies; his precepts approved but not carried out into action, his example honored but not

⁴ Zilboorg, *The Passing of the Old Order in Europe*, p. 182. Thomas Seltzer, New York.

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followed, his spirit recognized but not appropriated, nevertheless Christ remains.

This, then, is our day, as one observer sees it, the product not alone of those unceasing alterations which mark the advance of knowledge, the growth of experience, the march of time, and are the inevitable consequence of life, but the product also of the passion, war and disillusionment which make the tragic drama of time. Here is its spirit of revolt, its subjection to nature, its outreach toward unity, its pessimism brewed from the caldron of conflict, misery, and disappointment, and poisoning many of the springs of modern thought. Here are its searching and unanswered inquiries, its morbid introspections, its independence swelling to defiance of all authority, its insatiable quests for certitude. It is this day which is now challenging religion, and with which, in all its aspects, religion must deal. And the first enterprise which religion must now undertake for this particular and threatening day is to vindicate its own claims by a convincing redisclosure of its character.

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59:1

CHAPTER II

THE REDISCOVERY OF RELIGION

THE remark with which the former chapter closed, to the effect that the first enterprise which religion must undertake to-day is to vindicate its own claim by a convincing redisclosure of its character, is little more than a declaration of the obvious. On every hand one may hear a veritable chorus positively forecasting the religion for the day and for the days to come. In 1913 Professor Bury, interpreting the "new Monism," found the "mark of spiritual progress in the fact that religion is gradually becoming less indispensable. The further we go back in the past, the more valuable is religion as an element in civilization; as we advance, it retreats more and more into the background, to be replaced by science."¹ Professor Zilboorg more recently has written that "A new life and a new religion must come into Europe, a religion which will first of all have for its keystone the value of an individual per se, and a belief in society as a solidarized gathering of individuals."² Professor Ellwood is more

¹ Bury, *History of Freedom of Thought*, p. 230. Henry Holt and Company.

² Zilboorg, *The Passing of the Old Order in Europe*, p. 171. Thomas Seltzer, New York.

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specific. "The religion needed by the modern world," he declares, is "a more rational, revitalized, socialized Christianity."³

These forecasts undoubtedly point the way to truth. They are significant formulations of very widespread and various convictions as to the nature of the religion which will be adequate for the times before us. Mr. H. G. Wells, writing of the great intellectual epoch of Alexandria prior to the advent of Christianity, has said that "men were requiring deities with an outlook at least as wide as the empires";⁴ which could be written as truthfully to-day. It is the universal mind of the Hebrew prophets which is reasserting itself to-day, the mind, that is, of Amos, who saw the Ethiopians as the children of Israel unto Jehovah; the mind of the author of Jonah, who recognized beyond his racial prejudices the claims of Nineveh upon the compassion of God. It is the universal Christ of Saint Paul whom we must now realize; in whom "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman." To borrow a modern word, we must come to a Christian Internationale in a vital and effective community

³ Ellwood, *The Reconstruction of Religion*, p. viii. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

⁴ Wells, *Outline of History*, Vol i, p. 411. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

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of spirit. That, of course, is a New-Testament emphasis. Jesus' message was of the kingdom of God; and it would be difficult indeed to understand the triumphant note through all the mystery and magnificence of the Apocalypse except on the thesis that Christianity is ultimately a spiritual order coincident with the total activity of human life, and so transforming, directing, sustaining all that we mean by international movements and ideals. As Doctor Cadman has written, "If Christianity cannot consolidate the race in Christ and redeem it by his mediatorship, it means nothing more and does nothing more than any other literary faith."⁵

But there is another emphasis. Without denying the racial outreach of Christianity there is a somewhat less inclusive delineation of it which is prominent in the mind of the day. It is the delineation of it as an ethical imperative, a practical organization of conduct and ideal occupying the field of national life and purpose. It has its precedent in the conversion of Constantine, the significance of which was not that Christianity had won the allegiance of a king but that it had changed the policy of an empire. It has precedent also in that organi-

⁵ Cadman, *Ambassadors of God*, p. 36. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

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zation of New-Testament principle and intention which lay within the austere extravagance of the Republic of Geneva; and yet another in the fundamental effectiveness of the Puritan commonwealth.

The pronouncement of Professor Ellwood reflects still another emphasis much stressed by contemporary thinking, namely, that the religion for the day must be first and foremost right relationship among men, a social rectitude effective in justice, democracy, fraternity, through the orders and enterprises of labor, leisure, pleasure, and possession. And while it is true that Christendom, as was written almost a generation ago, "is full of Christianities, and to say what simply and essentially is the Christian religion is one of the problems of the . . . century,"⁶ yet if we shall discover the character of religion which will satisfy this present social demand, we shall have found that which the others seek.

For the present day is preeminently a day of social exploration. Its revolt springs most violently from the social organization of contemporary life; its progress in the understanding of nature issues first in social results; its trend toward the unity of humankind is particularly fostered through the social orders of industry;

⁶ Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, p. 25. Fleming H. Revell Company.

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its pessimism derives most effectively from the failure of the social order to satisfy the human ideal. The age of industrialism, inaugurated in 1776 by Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Wilkinson's cylinders which made Watts' steam engine a commercial success, has produced its fatal results in organized social injustice on the one hand, and a hopelessly materialistic conception of life on the other; and religion is inevitably appraised by the quality of its social applications.

This social estimate of religion is made all the more authoritative now because of the failure of religion in the past to recognize its social obligation. John Newton wrote the hymn,

“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see!”

as he sat on the deck of the slave ship he commanded, the hold of which was packed with Negroes torn by force from Africa to be sold into hopeless and cruel bondage, concerning which he said “he never had the least scruples.” No little of the bitterness of society and the scandal of the church, in every generation, has been that so many men who were good Christians when considered personally, have been

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bad citizens socially regarded; and men who in their private character have loved God sincerely, in their public capacity have not loved other men at all. There can be no doubt that Professor Zilboorg is right in his contention that the new religion must express the value of the individual and a belief in society. The religion which does that adequately will not be superseded by Professor Bury's science, for it will itself be scientific enough to endure.

I

Where, now, shall we discover this "revitalized, socialized Christianity"? In one of his earlier volumes Mr. Gilbert Chesterton observes that he had always had a fancy for writing a romance about an English yachtsman who miscalculated his course, and discovered England, under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas. "What could be more delightful," he asks, "than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with the humane security of coming home again?"⁷ Mr. Chesterton uses his fancy to illustrate his own spiritual pilgrimage; but his unwritten romance may do service with a far broader applicability than to his personal experience. It will

⁷ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 14. Dodd, Mead and Company.

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represent the pilgrimage of the modern mind in its search to-day for security and direction among the perilous high places of the spiritual life. When the present age, so revolutionary, so discontented and adventuresome, reaches the end of its quest for an authentic apprehension of life, of duty, and of hope, it will find itself in no new country of revelation, but back home in the faith once delivered to the saints. This is not to say that the faith once delivered to the saints was delivered once for all, and that our spiritual homeland remains unchanged in form and aspect down all the changing years. The fields of experience and thought, like those of the American West, have doubtless altered greatly since the earlier settlers took possession. The woods are cleared, old crops have given place to harvests formerly undreamed. But the uplands are the same, the valleys slope sunward as before, the streams still murmur from their ancient springs, and daybreak kindles glory as of old upon the far horizon lines.

It is to be remarked in passing that this rediscovery of religion is no new theme. Nearly seventy-five years ago young Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote to a friend, "The more clearly I see, the more fervently I surrender myself to, the new impulse that is come on the world . . . the more I find everywhere ground

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of discontent in all our existing religious and ecclesiastical forms.”⁸ At hardly any period in the past eighteen hundred years could those words not have been written as pertinently as they were in 1848. The great historical developments and divergences of Christianity have always sprung from the ground of discontent in contemporary religious and ecclesiastical forms. The Great Awakening, The Oxford Movement, The Wesleyan Revival, the German Reformation, the popular evangel of Wycliffe and the Lollards—all such historic activities of the human spirit, transforming here, deflecting there, the stream of religious life and habit, have been preceded by new impulses come upon the world, and have resulted in the disclosure of religion in aspects, energies, efflorescences, which impressed and captured men as indubitable revelations of an original quality and kind.

Unless one holds this clearly in mind, error will beset him on every hand as he attempts to formulate the “Christianity for the times” which is so prominent in present-day thinking. Different as these historic religious movements were, at heart they were alike. Each began in the personal experience of the individual. It

⁸ Higginson, *Life and Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, p. 15. Houghton Mifflin Company.

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is upon this familiar island we must beach our ships again; for Christianity, whatever may be its expansions and articulations in international, national and social orders, is fundamentally a personal experience of God, and public life, social relationships, industrial ethics, will reach no further and rise no higher than their source in personal experience. One can hardly escape the feeling that the social enthusiasm of the day has almost reached the point of mistaking good citizenship for sanctity and of counting a man a Christian disciple if he does what any honest pagan could do as well. "The social interest does not create the clean heart."⁹ Without relaxing our concern for the social application of religion, we must reestablish once more the primacy of personal experience related to God through Christ, and thus obligated to the reconstruction of the entire human order, not by the instruments of social prudence but by the constraints of a divine life.

Modern religion is very properly relating men and women to new ideals of social order, to new political theories and new industrial programs; and therein has somewhat fallen into a very natural and subtle error. It has influenced men and women to identify religion

⁹ *Christianity and Problems of To-day* (Bross Lectures for 1921), p. 73. Charles Scribner's Sons, Publishers.

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with that social relationship, and the essential quality of a new personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ has been obscured. The appeal of even so primitive-minded an evangelist as Billy Sunday is, generally speaking, not that men and women should come to know God but that they should inaugurate a new personal habit: should pay their debts and brighten the corner where they are—nothing of which is primarily and peculiarly Christian. It is an appeal not for a new personal experience but for a new ethical program. What has been lacking, in other words, in our organized and individual life, is not right purpose; what has been lacking is power.

In saying that Christianity, into whatever other relationships it may develop, is primarily a personal relationship to God through the historical and spiritual Christ, it must also be added that we shall probably have to enlarge our definitions of experience. We shall probably be compelled to restate the formulas of relationship. But it is this older conception of Christianity, as begun in personal experience of a particular kind and through a particular approach, which must be rediscovered. Of late it has been seriously obscured. We have been so concerned, as Professor Fitch has said, "with the effect of our religion upon the com-

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munity that we have forgotten that the heart of religion is found in the solitary soul.”¹⁰

That merits the more consideration now because the evils to be eradicated from these greater social orders trace back, at last, to the solitary soul. Past the influence of machinery, the operations of economic “laws,” the pressure of long tradition, the force of class consciousness and the like, at the roots of social evil is individual will. It was not chancelleries which plunged the world in war; it was chancellors. It is not diplomacy that fosters the selfish, hostile attitudes of antagonistic states; it is diplomats. It is not capital that sins against the rights of labor and the public good; it is capitalists. It is not organized labor that profiteers in bad workmanship and idleness, that massacres miners and threatens government; it is laborers and labor leaders. And the impotence of these socialized conceptions of religion in the face of international, national, and industrial emergencies rises out of their disconnection from the inner energies of the personal religious life. “An awakened soul is the beginning of things.”¹¹ Only men and women who are personally Christian can make a Christian society; and the search for a Christian social

¹⁰ Fitch, *Preaching and Paganism*, p. 171. Yale University Press.

¹¹ *Christianity and Problems of To-day* (Bross Lectures for 1921), p. 74. Charles Scribner's Sons, publishers.

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order is, first of all, a search for the Christian men and women who will make it.

II

But more is involved in this rediscovery of religion than the simple and rather easy return to the familiar evangelical insistence upon a particular experience as its heart. When we shall have come back to it, how shall we realize that experience, and how shall we maintain its creative spiritual energies adequate to the expanding social activities through which it is to be expressed?

Some one has written of John Calvin that he thought the one way to realize Christianity was by knowing the mind of Christ; and that this mind was expressed in the Scriptures; and that Calvin's cause is to be judged by his service in rendering the Scriptures living and credible. It is not to be denied that even this far after Calvin's day we shall realize Christianity only as we know the mind of Christ; and it is a fair conclusion that we shall know the mind of Christ only as, under the greating lights of science, psychology and social history, the Scriptures become newly living and credible to us. We have come back to the data of Christianity in the experience of the soul; what, therefore, about its

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documents? What about the Bible and the modern religious life?

That is one of the older questions with which religion as well as common sense—which, by the way, is not an alternative to religion—has had to meet; and it is still, as Professor James Moffatt has said in his Hibbert Lectures for 1921, “a central problem to define the exact relation of Christianity to its sacred book.”¹² One of the types of mind appearing from time to time within the church has difficulty in using the Old Testament as a Christian instrument. If one were compelled to discriminate between the Old and New in mutually exclusive fashion, of course, there would be no question as to the supremacy of the New Testament for the Christian life. But no such discrimination has sharply to be made. Whatever inspiration may or may not be, there was, as will be suggested in another lecture, insight greater than can be described as a majority vote in certain councils, in the selection, through many generations, of the total body of literature which constitutes the Christian Bible; and the Old Testament is an integral part of the whole. Neither must it be forgotten that to the people of the New Testament the

¹²Moffatt, *The Approach to the New Testament*, p. 30. George H. Doran Company.

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Old Testament was the Bible. "In it they found their credentials for the past and their hopes for the future—in short, the explanation of their position as the community which looked up to Jesus Christ as the final revelation of God's redeeming purpose in history."¹³ Jesus was the only man, as another modern scholar suggests, who ever had the right to lay the Book aside, and he made it immortal.

But how, in this rediscovered religion, are we to use the Bible as a living and credible Scripture? It is a great deal more difficult to use now than it ever was before. It is studied by a great many more people than ever; scholarship has done that much for it. What is called its cultural value has been increasingly recognized; what is known as its ethical significance is more acknowledged and quoted than ever. But that isn't all the story. Its application has been directed into new imperatives, its meanings have been related to new enterprises. A couple of generations ago Walter Savage Landor filled five volumes with *Imaginary Conversations* between famous persons; they are read with pleasure and profit to-day. But the most celebrated of them is not as interesting as would be a conversation between a present-day student of the

¹³ Moffatt, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

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Bible and a Puritan preacher of the days from Cromwell to Cotton Mather. Your Puritan read the prophets to find the doom of kings and the foreordinations of the "majestic predestinating God"; the modern student reads them to discern the principles of economic justice. Your Puritan was not as much at home in the New Testament as he might have been, but when he read the Gospels it was to discover, what the preaching of Samuel Rutherford disclosed, "the loveliness of Christ"; the modern student reads them to disentangle their social meanings and to construct a program of the church, applicable to the industrial and political conditions of the time. One of the speakers at a recent conference on the application of Christianity to the social order said, "I know of no socialist whose program has not been better stated by Jesus Christ"; yet Christ was no socialist, and was never confronted with anything like the political and industrial conditions of to-day.

Within the church, our latest developments of the idea of religious education, with our teacher-training activities, have given new impetus to an old but still practical incentive to the reading of the Bible. Here, also, the prophets are searched for their social messages and the New Testament for its principles of

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economic and political action, and nothing more distinguishes the modern church school from the Sunday school of former days than the extent to which the social interpretation of the Bible has become the new but effective tradition of religious pedagogy. With these more scientific and productive ideals and uses of the Bible, nevertheless, an old purpose dominates a not inconsiderable body of Bible readers, namely, that they may have something to teach. That, as need not be argued, is the peril of preachers. We are so intent upon texts that we sometimes miss the personal challenge. We are so straitened to preach, at times, that we get from the Bible something to say rather than something to know and feel. We are sometimes so familiar with it as the source of sermons that we fail to find it the source of life.

The Bible is now harder to read aright than ever. It requires more study and a deeper apprehension than before. But when we shall have rediscovered religion as the once familiar experience of God through the historic and spiritual Christ, we shall learn anew that the Bible is neither a treatise nor a fetish, but a means to a certain end. The movement for religious education is an indispensable and saving enterprise of the churches upon which

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we are all agreed, and no one will deny the inestimable value of it to the religious life of tomorrow; but there is one fundamental point of view which must be increasingly emphasized. It is the point of view disclosed in Professor Bowne's remark that people do not need the Bible considered as a book. "They need the Christian way of thinking about God and his purposes concerning men; and they need the Bible only as it helps them to this view."¹⁴

To us our learning has made it a literature; to our fathers it was the Word of God. We are reading it to discover what the social order should become; but it has spoken to the social order only as men have read it to discover, first, what they themselves ought to be. We cannot ignore the logic of Calvin, that the way to realize Christianity is by knowing the mind of Christ; and that this mind is expressed in the Scriptures. Thomas Carlyle's mother is said to have written to him, at the height of his erudition and fame, "Tammie, dinna lose the Word in the learnin'." It is an injunction profitably to be remembered. The Bible which discloses the mind of Christ is primarily a book of intelligent devotion to be read as the word of God to the growing and aspiring soul. Christianity, as the world is now discovering,

¹⁴ Bowne, *Christian Revelation*, p. 15. The Methodist Book Concern.

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is something not so much to be proved as to be practiced; and looking toward the practice of it, the supreme lack of Christian men, as well as of those not Christian, is the companionable sense of God. The Bible, with all the reasonable insights and reappraisals which historical criticism has brought to it, read primarily as the uninterrupted habit of the devout life, will reclaim and sustain that companionable sense of God. That also is included in the familiar country of rediscovered Christianity.

III

On an earlier page it was remarked that only Christian men and women can make a Christian society, and the search for a Christian social order is really a search for the Christian men and women who can make it. But what, meanwhile, of the special order which Christian men and women already constitute? Rediscovering the data of religion and the significance of its documents—the Christian experience of God and the devotional use of the Bible—what about its organized activities and associations? What, in short, about the church? That is an inevitable question now. It is unnecessary to stress the unsatisfactory position which the church has occupied in the superficial thinking of the age; or to inquire to what extent

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contemporary dissatisfaction with the church is well founded. Perhaps it may be taken that the suggestion made by the author of *Painted Windows* reflects an acute diagnosis of the situation. "It is not the voice of atheism we hear; it is the voice of the church that we miss."¹⁵

Yet the assertion can be made with little fear of denial that the churches were never dealing so directly or practically with the everyday conditions of human life, never were they speaking with more intelligence and insight than they are to-day. But Henry James, returning from his residence in England to write *The American Scene*, said: "The field of American life is as bare of the church as a billiard table of a center piece; a truth that the myriad little structures 'attended' on Sundays and on the 'off' evenings of their 'sociables' proclaim as with the audible sound of the roaring of a million mice."¹⁶

Of course no one in America, unless he be of those curious humorists who call themselves the Young Intellectuals, needs to be told the provinciality on the one hand and the exaggeration on the other in that remark. Henry James was always more involved in his style

¹⁵ *Painted Windows*, p. 136. Courtesy of G. P. Putnam's Sons, Publishers, New York and London.

¹⁶ James, *The American Scene*, p. 367. Harper & Brothers.

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than accurate in his insight. But that the churches of America should have made so little impression even on him, that such exaggeration was possible even to him, carries with it a measure of rebuke. The reason for it would seem to be, however, not, as the author of *Painted Windows* supposes, that the voice of the church is absent but that men do not hear it speaking what it ought preeminently to say.

For the primary and paramount business of the church, however its forms may change and flow like water, is to keep the Christian society alive to that sense of God which religious experience inaugurates in the individual and which the devotional use of the Bible maintains. The church is the only institution which can do that; and while it ought to initiate and reenforce a multitude of "practical" enterprises, if amid its largest success in prosecuting them it leaves this undone, it has failed, as a church, of its fundamental purpose. The church must insist, through its forms, through its fellowships, through its worship, through its educational activities, through its pulpit ministry and pastoral service, upon that commerce of the soul with God which no other institution can ever attempt; and by as much as the church ceases to do that, among ever so many worthwhile practical undertakings,

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as Professor Fitch has said, "She has thereby given up her real excuse for being, and her peculiar and distinctive mission is gone."¹⁷

One must admit that this direction of thought goes quite opposite to much of the modern critical mood, for it is this otherworldliness of the church which has been most frequently and severely criticized. Mr. John Galsworthy makes one of the characters in his *Saint's Progress* say that the church "stands in the dusk, with its spire to a heaven which exists no more, its bells still beautiful but out of tune with the music of the streets."¹⁸ The inference of the remark is, and the direct charge of the general criticism which beats against the church to-day is, that the bells ought to be brought into tune with the streets. But they never were. When Jesus said, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," the bells of the spire were not in tune with the streets. When Paul wrote the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians the bells of the spire were not in tune with the streets. When Saint Augustine published his *City of God* amid the calamities of the barbarian invasion of Rome, the bells of the spire were not in tune with the streets. When Wycliffe translated,

¹⁷ Fitch, *Preaching and Paganism*, p. 66. Yale University Press.

¹⁸ Galsworthy, *Saint's Progress*, p. 179. Charles Scribner's Sons.

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and Luther fought, and Wesley proclaimed the witness of the Spirit, the bells of the spire were not in tune with the streets. It is a very unpleasant truth which Dean Inge not long ago announced, but it is a truth Christian people have to face, that "If we ally ourselves with mankind 'in the loomp,' we shall ally ourselves with mankind at its worst."¹⁹ The church, retreating not so much as a step from the most advanced attempts to affect, for righteousness and equity, the social, industrial, and political order, has yet, as its supreme business, to make real and effective the presence of God in the Christian order. The music of the streets must tune up to the bells in the spire.

Rediscovering religion, then, we shall find it to be an experience of God rather than a propaganda of reform; the Bible, through its disclosures as literature, a breviary of devotion; and the church, once more, "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness." Rediscovering that, we shall find ourselves at the very springs of the Christianizing of the social order, for only men and women so experienced, so devout, so associated, can become, in Bishop Hughes' fine phrase, "eager participants in earth's affairs under the sense of God." And only such participants

¹⁹ Inge, *The Church and the Age*, p. 77f. Longmans, Green & Co.

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can realize the Christianity which is the end and purpose of all our present social enthusiasm. A Christianity which, while it will be, first of all, an experience personally within, will then, and just because of that, become a sublime and august order of thought, of conduct, of relationships, at one with justice, with democracy, with the harmonious interactions of nations and the effective organization of society; at one also with the spirit of all good institutions and the enforcement of all good laws; a sublime and august order of righteousness as inclusive as humanity and as durable as God.

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CHAPTER III

THE RETURN TO THEOLOGY

I

THE subject of the former chapter will serve as a reminder of another contemporary mood in the church besides that which is demanding a socialized religion. It is a mood, not so prominent in the published propaganda of the churches but which is being felt nevertheless over considerable areas of the church's life. It is that temper of mind and feeling which is demanding what those who voice the demand call "the simple gospel." In revolt from the authority with which modern science has invaded the evangel, and to an extent determines its form, in a reaction against the erudition which has been growing into the literature of scriptural comment and exposition, in a half-confusion before the multiplying volumes in which religion has sought to secure and use, for its own purposes, the findings of psychology, in weariness and bewilderment from the new vocabularies of the social enthusiasm, on the one hand, and the movements of religious education, on the other, a not inconsiderable body of men and women in the

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church, and a surprisingly large number of men and women outside the formal activities of the church, are asking of the pulpit and claiming to seek for themselves what they describe as the plain faith of the New Testament, the simple gospel of the past.

It sounds like a reasonable request, but when you take it up you face the question as to where you will find the simple gospel of the past and the plain faith of the New Testament. Not in the Epistle to the Romans, surely; nor in the second chapter of Galatians, nor the letter to the Ephesians, nor the letter to the Hebrews; nor even in the Gospel of John. The fact is that there is no such thing as the simple gospel. There are some simple steps by which an inquiring spirit comes to apprehend and accept the gospel; but when you try to put into language the Christian tradition—how the infinite God became incarnate in the human Jesus, and by a human death at the hands of a judicial mob and a military guard redeemed the race from the inexorabilities of sin—there will be nothing simple about that story. What has happened is simply that the pulpit, and hence the pew, for not a few years have seized on the first of the easily understood steps which the spirit takes in accepting the gospel, have collected a few simple characteristics of the divine

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life, disconnected from the profound relationships and implications which give them meaning, and have called the collection the simple gospel. And it may be said that there are few perils more subtly menacing the church to-day, and more impoverishing the spiritual life of the Christian world, than this reiteration of rudimentary and disconnected truths to the exclusion of the greating intellectual and practical developments therefrom.

Because, whatever we may find the Christian experience essentially to be, our experience of it we recognize in the presence and persistence of certain high and sustaining emotions. But the error into which large numbers of good men and women fall is that of failing to realize that high and persistent emotions can be maintained only by the exercise of high and persistent thought. As the years pass and they come to understand this, amid the pressure of life and the confusions of duty men and women find themselves asking, not "What must I do?" or "What do I feel?" but "What can I believe?"

When one begins to answer that question he discovers that he is dealing with theology, that discredited enterprise, which our generation long since put out of the door only to have it come back through the window. With that question one learns, as our day is now learning,

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that the stress of events, the bitterness of the industrial strife, the economic blunders and injustices throughout the world, the political betrayals which have plunged it into poverty and violence, the recurrent beat of sorrow, suffering, and despair, are all too much for the easy-going sentiments which men have misnamed liberality, and for the fragments of religious tradition and custom which they call the simple gospel. Neither sentiment nor fragments are now enough for the souls of men. Only indubitable and commanding verities, only impregnable insights, will meet the necessities of the hour. What is the whole of Christianity? That is the world's desperate question to-day. We have had enough of aspects, rudiments, and phases; we must return to an articulated body of sustaining and defensible and productive belief.

Right at the very beginning of what I have in mind to say there are, of course, some misunderstandings to be precluded. When we speak of theology we do not mean, for instance, any sharp-tongued discussion of those secondary interests which, in the past, too often developed opinions into prejudices and became barriers to Christian fellowship. That vital theology to which we have now to return, toward which the world of thinking men and

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women is now groping, will be no propaganda of differences but a reasonable and open-minded exploration of the meaning of our common religious experience. As in the ancient days of Israel, when, as it is written, every man did that which seemed good in his own eyes, there was no nation but only a loose collection of feeble and desolated clans; so in our recent years, when every man has thought about religious values as seemed good in his own eyes, though for lack of knowledge and discipline few had the conveniences for accurate thinking, Protestantism has lacked coherence, and consequently both the sense and the impact of power. The theological thinking and discussion which have been a discrimination of differences rather than an exposition of our spiritual commonwealth have too frequently led to men's becoming more interested in defending their differences than in discerning the truth; so that, as Dr. George A. Gordon has remarked, "There has been an astonishing amount of lying . . . done in the supposed interest of the glory of God."¹

Then, again, when we speak of returning to theology, we do not mean to return to all the formal language in which the stiff old days

¹ Gordon, *Aspects of the Infinite Mystery*, p. 58. Houghton Mifflin Company.

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expressed, and frequently concealed, their thoughts. What Bishop McDowell wrote with a twinkle in his eye can be remembered with a shadow in the heart: "An ordinary saint is not sure he wants to be saved when he hears the theological name for salvation, or live forever when he hears the theological term for the doctrine of the future life."² We have no interest to-day in the repetition of ancient religious language but in the return to the sources of growing religious life.

Once more, when we come back to an intelligent interest in theology, we are returning, not merely to an intellectual exercise but to very effective participation in practical affairs. Every religious movement in the past, which has accomplished vital and permanent changes in social and national life, has begun in the declaration of, and popular enthusiasm for, theological doctrines. The pre-reformation in Bohemia, the Lutheran Reformation in Germany, the Wesleyan Revival in England, the Great Awakening in America—one by one you can name the transforming spiritual movements and discover them to have had their roots in new theological apprehensions.

Notwithstanding the much-emphasized fact

² McDowell, *Good Ministers of Jesus Christ*, p. 91. The Abingdon Press.

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that the teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, are expressed in language quite removed from what we know as theological phraseology, fundamentally every Christian belief is theological. You can fail to recognize theology, but you cannot evade it and be Christian. Some twenty years ago the author of a book widely read at the time said of Jesus that "He came not to elaborate a system of theology or ethics, but to introduce himself to men's minds and hearts, and left men with the question, not, 'What think ye of this doctrine or that principle?' but 'What think ye of Christ?'"³ But when you ask "What think ye of Christ?" you are asking the profoundest and most far-reaching question which theology knows. When some saint says simply, "I believe in Christ; that is all the theology I need," the saint has to go, in fact, a great deal further than he admits in speech. He has to take for granted a great deal more than he investigates. Who is this Christ in whom he believes, and what kind of Person and character is he from whom these nineteen centuries of Christendom have risen? The simplest statement of Christian experience involves you in the entire theological order. John Wesley was putting it as simply as he knew when he

³ Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, p. 17. Fleming H. Revell Company.

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defined the witness of the Spirit as "an immediate impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ has loved me, and given himself for me, and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God." Looked at closely, one discovers that this classic definition, every word of which is immediately comprehensible by the most limited intelligence, is really a figure of speech involving acceptance of the body of Christian doctrine. Or take the commoner expressions of experience and decision to be heard in the unstudied, untheological gatherings of Christian people: I have accepted Christ as my Saviour! I have been saved from my sins! The Lordship of Jesus! They mean nothing that is not theological. What kind of Being is this Christ who is accepted as Saviour? How does he save? What is implied in the phrase "saved from"? The moment one goes below the surface of his phraseology to understand what his words mean he is at close grips with theology.

In his great story of Belgium under the German occupation Mr. Brand Whitlock tells of a man who greatly annoyed the American Legation with his demands for protection, and describes him as having the type of mind which

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confuses words with acts, and thinks that problems have been solved when the words describing them have been discovered. Protestantism, to say nothing of Methodism, has been seriously enfeebled by the prevalence of that type of mind in respect of religious interests. It is that type of mind which, having no theological instruction from the practical and undoctinal pulpit of the last generation, and no theological apprehension of its own experience, has gone out into the extravagances of Premillennialism, has turned back into what it miscalls Fundamentalism, and has become a prey to Christian Science and other vagaries based upon dramatic but fragmentary aspects of truth. A sound theology, as has been remarked many times, is the only safeguard against insidious superstition.

There will be no denial of what has just been said; but, for the sake of illustration, let us follow this a little further. Dealing now with the substance of common experience, not the materials of intellectual disagreement, think for a moment concerning the fact of sin. Perhaps from no item of traditional Christian belief has our generation traveled further, in practical effect, than it has traveled from the elder conception of sin. It is at this point that one can observe the sharpest paradox of

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modern religious life. It has come to emphasize overwhelmingly, in sentiment and word, the infinite love of God, and in practice to ignore, to equally great extent, the fact of sin; yet the love of God is apparently contradicted by nature, by history, and by a good deal of experience, and the fact of sin can be found on every hand. If preachers have not grown silent about sin, as has been sometimes charged, even men who employ the old vocabularies seem to have lost some of the old vehemence in condemnation of it. It does not seem to impress our generation as being anything like as bad as it used to be, and the older sanctities have almost given way to a modern amiability. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the rank and file of Christian society appraises sin, not by the august standard of the ancient moral law, but by the shifting social customs of the changing hour. Personal sin has nothing of the former sting and terror in it. Some sins are taboo because they are counted vulgar, and some are not tolerated because of their embarrassing effects; but the sinister menace of sin no longer threatens life. Nearly thirty years ago R. W. Dale felt the change and wrote a diagnosis which the years since then have increasingly confirmed. The religious life as he knew it, he said, "has commonly originated in

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a sense of the loneliness of the soul that has not found God; or of the incompleteness of life when there is no distinct vision of its infinite horizon; or it has sprung from a desire to reach a perfection which is inaccessible apart from the divine power and grace; or there has been a great sorrow, and the heart has turned to God for consolation; or the authority of Christ has appealed to conscience and has constrained the submission of the will; or a man has discovered that the religious faith of his wife or his child or his friend is the source of a power and elevation and peace which he thinks he would like to possess; or there has been a vague impression that there would come to him, in answer to trust in Christ and to prayer, and as the result of the persistent endeavors to do Christ's will, some great, undefined, and unknown good. But in comparatively few instances has it seemed to me that there was any keen sense of the guilt of sin—as distinguished from the evil of sin—or any vehement desire for God's pardon.”⁴

Now, neither the Bible nor our actual life knows any such softening of the fierce edge of sin's reality. In both the Bible and life it is written that sin is sin, and that the wages of sin is death. It is something more than a violation

⁴ Dale, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 252. George H. Doran Company.

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of social custom. It is something more than an explosion of animal instinct. It is something more than an error in judgment. It is something more than a disharmony in human relationships. It is a profound and productive energy, real enough and constant enough to have distorted history and deflected society from its affirmed ideals and wrought in individuals and groups irreparable tragedies of agony and despair. If you take the Christian attitude expressed in the New Testament and say that Christ died for sin, then you have another standard; and the higher you evaluate Christ, the more real and enormous sin is.

Nevertheless not a few minds are inquiring whether we ought not to ignore this older and threatening conception of sin, and stress the happier and more wholesome elements in experience and life. It is not necessary to indicate the directions from which they are influenced to such an attitude, nor the unsoundness of the philosophy on which their attitude takes its stand. It will be more pertinent to remind you that what a man thinks about sin will determine what he thinks about everything else. If sin is a trifle to him, whatever he considers the equivalent of salvation will be no larger; you cannot have a great deliverance from a small danger. If sin, for instance, is

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a matter of animal inheritance, or violated race custom, or mistaken judgment, then repentance can be no more than a rather formal reaction. If sin, whatever one considers it, may be ignored in the interest of an optimistic ethical emphasis, then Jesus was a Hebrew Don Quixote, and the crucifixion was a lynching party. What one thinks about sin will determine what he thinks about men. If sin is a social accident which can be disregarded, then justice is a social fad which may be neglected. If the sense of sin is something of race memory surviving the withdrawal of primitive inhibitions, then babies slaughtered by impure milk and gutter fevers, children driven through the mills into tuberculosis and premature graves, men and women broken on the wheel of unsocial industry, populations swept by violence and preventable famine, signify no more than opportunities for political expedients. Here lies one of the perils of the present social enterprise and passion of the church which, of late years, has substituted sociology for theology and retired doctrinal preaching in favor of card-index systems, namely, that, as Doctor Jowett suggested in his Yale Lectures, it will emphasize reform rather than redemption, and while lifting the rod of oppression will still leave the burden of guilt. What men think

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about sin will reflect what they think about God. If sin isn't the most terrible reality in the universe; if not what men are doing but what they are becoming isn't the most fateful element in our social disorder and strife; if not to have lost one's rights but to have kept one's wrongs isn't the worst moral disaster in the world, then right relationship with God is not nearly as important as we have thought, and the New Testament insistence upon it is a misplaced emphasis.

Or, at the other extreme of doctrinal thinking there are the fact and character of God, and all life depends upon what one thinks about him. Right thinking about God would have saved multitudes of men and women their fortitude, their consolation, their hope and peace, during the catastrophes of war and pestilence which have wrecked the faith of so many. For a generation we have been drifting in a flabby reliance upon the unexamined tenderness of God, and his holiness has been almost lost. We have stumbled over the thought of his power because we have obscured his righteousness. We have tried to explain what he has been doing while we paid no attention to what he must be. Thinking of God in mediæval terms, as an absolute monarch, the wreckage of society has given unpublished atheism new life; think.

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ing of him as the Great Democrat, laboring with a free people in the struggle for a perfect social order, will bring back a faith as effective as it will be buoyant. But a good many men and women will have to think more seriously and in more orderly fashion than they have been doing. Rabbi Duncan, that famous Scotch scholar-preacher who thought his way from agnosticism to Christian experience, said that when he knew there was a God he "danced upon the brig o' Dee with delight." There will likewise be no exuberance of spirit, no rejoicing by the world of our generation, after these bleak experiences through which it has gone and the bewilderments in which it now labors, until it also knows once more that there is a God, and knows what kind of God he is. What is thus true of the idea of and belief in God is also true of those other judgments which go to the making of Christian faith and hope. They must be given precision and form—in a word, they must be formulated in reasonable and consistent definition in order to safeguard and direct experience.

II

Undoubtedly, there is now a protest waiting to present itself against the immediate implications of what has just been said. It is a

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protest very popular with those volatile minds which, with the utmost sincerity and devotion of purpose, are more progressive in spirit than careful in their estimates of the actualities of progress. It is a protest phrased in the words of a speaker who said not long ago, according to printed report, "We are convinced that . . . saying the old words is not going to be sufficient to catch the attention or command the respect of our bewildered fellow men."

That is a statement to be classified as interesting but not wholly true. It depends on what the old words are and what meaning one puts into them. The word "Liberty," for example, is a very old word. It stirred profoundly the noblest spirits of the Greek world. It sustained the exodus of Semitic bondsmen from their Egyptian servitude. It was the boast of Roman citizenship in its days of pride and power. It woke the sleeping heroism of later Latin peoples, and produced the Italian republics, and, still later, united Italy. It wove a crown of sacrifice and independence for the Swiss cantons. It drenched France in blood and terror, and brought into being a new era. It inspired the foundation of the American republic. It is a fairly old word, but it still moves humanity as modern terminologies, such as the dictatorship of the proletariat, with

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which the speaker quoted seemed somewhat sympathetic, have so far failed to do. The word "Justice" is a very old word. It was the foundation of the civil economy of the Hebrew state, the constant theme of Greek thinking, the organized passion of Rome in her greatest contribution to the life of civilization. It inspired the social energy of mediæval England; was the slogan of the French Revolution; and is now the battle cry of the forces of reconstruction and reform moving upon our present discredited social system. "Brotherhood" is a very old word. It came with a strange, new winsomeness from the lips of Jesus; it awakened deep and far hopes in the disadvantaged folks of ancient and oppressed orders, and is to-day the bugle music and marching song of the Internationale. New words sometimes catch attention, but they do not command respect until they have become, in a manner, old; it is the old words, properly intended and understood, that capture men. "God" is a very old word, and none of the new words of either science or modern sects has brought men more respect for the reality which it adumbrates. "Righteousness" is an old word, but men are striving more earnestly than ever to realize its content. "Sacrifice" is a very old word and it is becoming more vitalized every day.

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We shall be safeguarding ourselves from the isolation in which a sharp disregard for the old words would involve us, if we substitute for the remark quoted above the more restrained and truer observation of Dr. Robert Bruce Taylor, that "we are in an atmosphere which tends more and more to utter its faith in the language of the day."⁵ This is true, of course, because the language of the day springs from and expresses knowledge, experience, and ideal which earlier days had not acquired; and theology must react and relate itself to that newer knowledge, experience, and ideal. Earlier in the chapter it was remarked that any vital theology to which we would return would be a reasonable and open-minded exploration, not of our individual and isolated feelings, but of our common religious experience. We cannot, therefore, disregard whatever enriching and modifying influences have marked our modern life.

Of these influences which must be considered and appraised in our reformulations of theology, two are undeniably evident: the influence of modern science and the influence of democracy, rather, of the modern passion for democracy. Widely different as these enterprises of the

⁵ *Christianity and Problems of To-day*, p. 51. (Bross Lectures for 1921.) Charles Scribner's Sons, publishers.

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modern spirit are, in kind and in the sphere of their effects, they are alike in that they have radically altered our modes of thinking and some of our standards of social and religious value. Both are permanent factors in human experience, and the most sacred and ancient conceptions of truth must be intelligibly adjusted to the new realities of existence and relationship which they have revealed and, doubtless, will continue to disclose. In returning to theology then, to put it into more definite outlines, we shall come by way of comparative religions and the Scriptures as historical criticism presents them, in spite of the Fundamentalists; and by way of the natural and mental sciences, notwithstanding Mr. Bryan and his intellectual contemporary, Archbishop Ussher.

It need not be argued that the function of religion, of Christianity, to be explicit, is not primarily to furnish a reasonable explanation of our experiences in time, and of history which is the record of the race's experiences in time; that lies within the province of philosophy. The function of religion is to furnish a reasonable support to the human spirit and a reasonable expectation of personal and social destiny, so that the individual and the race may endure, on the one hand, the experiences they cannot

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explain, and, on the other, may labor intelligently to correct those maladjustments of relationship and purpose from which the untoward experiences so generally spring. Theology, in other words, must be related to and developed in contact with our actual life.

If now, one reads, the literature through which the significant moods of our day express themselves; if he appraises the characteristic conversation of men and women intelligently immersed in life; if one takes serious account of the contagious and emotional, rather than reasoned, interests which occupy, from time to time, the attention of apparently large numbers of people; he will find it difficult not to recognize at least three quite clearly defined needs, both social and personal, which have been developed by the stress and revolution of the period. There may be differences, of course, in the value which different observers attach to the various aspects of such a social diagnosis, but, broadly speaking, there are three social and personal needs of to-day to which religion must speak with authority; and with the authority, not of a traditional institution, but of reasonable conviction and truth; not in ever so moving but transient appeals to what we call the better feelings, but in a

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durable capture of intelligence and will. Religion can thus speak with permanent effect only through theological expressions of truth; in other words, only a living theology can meet these contemporary and living needs.

First is the need, both personal and social, for the sense of historical continuity. Ever since the Great War began men have thought and spoken of it as cutting them off sharply from the natural and comfortable past. They still call it a chasm closing in catastrophe a great and understood and satisfactory, if mistaken, age. Multitudes who have not tried to put into formal language their fears and convictions, nevertheless feel and act as if the whole world of orderly relationships, established values, and certain hopes, in which they dwelt at ease before the war, has gone forever—as, indeed, it has. Their inarticulate sense of its removal has colored their entire outlook and estimate of the present time, of society, and of the world itself. They had been at home in the atmosphere of development, and history was to them a record of advance and a prophecy of constant progress. But the war, its violence and evil, its disclosure of the savage instincts still untamed in man, its wreckage of institutions, its revelation of class and racial hates, all have seemed to deny the axiom on which hitherto

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they had lived. The world, they have come to feel, underneath its achievements in mechanical contrivances and the instruments of comfort, is not developing; it is only repeating itself. What they had thought was progress is only motion in a circle. The one indistinct but glorious far-off, divine event to which Tennyson taught them the whole creation moved has given place to undirected, incalculable, contradictory energies—natural, social, personal—and all of caprice; so that their world, once so secure, is hopelessly adrift, and life walks unregarded the weary ways of men. So that particularly men need again the sustaining sense of continuity with a durable and triumphant past, not merely in its social evolutions, but, preeminently, in its moral certitudes. It is that alone which will save them from what has been called the irony of individualism which, in spite of much social utterance, is still a fatality in present-day thought and feeling.

To this need for continuity comes now the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of God in the historic Jesus. After him history can never be other than an unbreakable movement, and, regardless of the interruptions of human violence and passion, moral progress is the very essence of the life of man. It is not the province of this chapter to expound any theological

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dogma, and hence it will be enough simply to name this doctrine of the incarnation as the church's answer to the present hour's demand and need for the sense of historical continuity. Yet it will not be amiss to say that not a few minds to-day—and the author is ready to confess his sympathy with them—are ready to go back to the conception of the incarnation which the great Greeks held, before that conception had been distorted by the Latin theologians in the interest of the temporal supremacy of an imperial church. It is the conception of the incarnation not as God's afterthought to rescue a world which had gone hopelessly from him, but as God's original self-disclosure of the world as eternally his—the Lamb slain from its foundation—and with good enough at its heart to provide the arena and the exhibition of his divine character in terms of human experience and life.

A second need, clamorous now amid the stress and revolution of the times, is the need for confidence—confidence in the value of human life, its ideals, its energies, and the world of harmonious social relationships toward which it labors. This, as will be immediately recognized, is easily akin to the need for the sense of continuity. As Dean Inge has written, "Ignorance of the past and indifference to the

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future generally go together.”⁶ There is to-day, as has already been observed, a vast pessimism in the minds of men, a skepticism of the worth and permanence of our social orders, of the significance of our human struggles, of the reasonableness of our more generous and inspiring ideals. The author of *Painted Windows* has written of Bishop Gore that “He has the look of one whose head has long been thrust out of a window gloomily expecting an accident to happen at the street corner.”⁷ That is the attitude of much of our present-day world; only the accident has already happened and there can be no future for the wreckage except rubbish. That is the attitude of minds so widely dissimilar that the condition is all the more serious. It is the attitude of the agnostic wing of society, cynically adjusting itself to make the hopeless best of a lost situation. It is the attitude of multitudes of men and women still struggling to hold their faith amid the currents of disillusionment and defeat. It is the attitude of the thoroughgoing premillennialists, rejoicing turbulently at the good news that the world has gone to the devil, and that Christ, whose cross has failed, is on his way to end the

⁶ Inge, *Outspoken Essays*, p. 54. Longmans, Green & Company.

⁷ *Painted Windows*, p. 7. Courtesy of G. P. Putnam's Sons, Publishers, New York and London.

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sorry business with an invincible and blessed hell.

But, as William James pointed out, pessimism consists in a religious demand to which there is no normal religious reply; and we have the religious reply to this demand for confidence, in the Christian doctrine of redemption, not simply as the rescue of the individual but as the conservation of the race. No one can find fault with the latter-day emphasis on Jesus as the prophet of the social conscience, but in addition we shall have to recognize the inescapable truth in the remark of Professor Fitch, in the volume already quoted, that "what has hastened our present paganism has been the removal from the forefront of our consciousness of Jesus, . . . the divine Redeemer."⁸ The pulpit will have to answer Bishop McDowell's anticipations suggested in his Yale Lectures some years ago, and "put the edge back upon the best truth we have, the truth of redemption." For only the certain conviction that the indestructible worth of humanity and life is determined in the redeeming victory of God will meet the present need for confidence in moral values and the moral destiny of men.

Then, finally, there is to-day a widespread need for that experience of inspiration, strength,

⁸ Fitch, *Preaching and Paganism*, p. 180f. Yale University Press.

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and continuing hope, which we gather into the word "consolation"—a need which is disclosed most dramatically and pathetically as well, in the world-wide revival of all forms of spiritualism, from commercialized chicanery to pseudo-scientific propaganda. "We had needs invent heaven," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, "if it had not been revealed to us; there are some things that fall so bitterly ill on this side time."⁹ The reason men and women crowd the lectures of Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir A. Conan Doyle is not alone because they are curious, but because they are crushed; not because they have cracked brains, but because they have broken hearts. Only the inscrutable disorders of personal tragedy can account for the respect given the current descriptions of the spiritualists' other world—a society without moral distinctions or moral purpose; continuity of the less noble aspects of consciousness, rather than immortality of personal life; Homer's underworld with all modern conveniences, having, according to these most eminent authorities in the science of applied make-believe, cigars, tobacco, brick houses and dogs, but no God. In this other world life goes on, so these propagandists inform us, terribly like life in this world, only more monotonous

⁹ Stevenson, *Saint Ives*, p. 149. Charles Scribner's Sons.

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and without hope; and the reason men and women who, we think, ought to know better, are captured by the prospect offered them is that they have not come or been directed to reasonable assurance of anything better. As a result they fail to see the essential tragedy in this spiritualist future life, namely, not that it has not been proved to exist, but that if it does exist, it is not worth having.

There is no necessity, at this point, of saying more than that the answer to this modern mood, this contemporary social and personal need, is not in ever so sympathetic exhortations or sentimental homilies such as are not uncommonly indulged above our dead. The answer which will adequately meet the need and the demand for consolation will be nothing less complete than intelligent exposition, in the light of modern science—of which, it is to be remarked, Professor Leuba is neither the most accurate nor authoritative representative—of a defensible and reasonable Christian doctrine of immortality, based upon the character of God and revealed in Christ and witnessed through the centuries by the intuitions and philosophy of the noblest and wisest minds.

Christian teaching, it may be remarked in conclusion, can justify its right to be exercised only as it results in the constant and effective

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invasion of life with the truths by which men live. It must continually reinterpret and illumine for men the indispensable doctrines of the Christian faith which, however easily they may be professed, are not truly appreciated except as "the spoil carried off from spiritual struggles, the harvest of a spiritual insight at once bestowed and directed by the Spirit of God."¹⁰

¹⁰ Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, p. 71. The Methodist Book Concern.

114:43

CHAPTER IV

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IN the chapter on "The Rediscovery of Religion" the contention was made that one of the fundamental consequences of the present day's dissatisfaction with organized religious forms would be the reestablishment of the primacy of religious experience. In the chapter which followed, under the title "The Return to Theology," the discussion urged the necessity of theological interpretations of faith and experience as the answer to the religious needs both of individual and the social life. It has been observed also as the witness of history that the great religious movements have begun in new or renewed personal religious experience, and have had their roots at the same time in new theological apprehensions. What, then, may be forecast as the kind of religious awakening, the direction of the religious thinking, which seems likely to follow our immediate time?

Dr. John A. Hutton has an answer to which we may well give consideration. "I sometimes think," he has written in his Alexander Robertson lectures, "we are all of us on the point of making the discovery that our Christianity is

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true.”¹ It is an answer in fairly sharp contrast to a good deal of the writing of the times, from which we cannot help gathering the suspicion that most of what we had thought was our Christianity is about to be exposed as false. One does not need to confine himself, for this inference, to the opponents of Christianity, either philosophical or practical, who view the anticipated debacle of religion with eagerness and satisfaction; it is discernible in the utterances of some earnest and sincere men and women within the Christian confession, who are turning impatiently from the Christianity of tradition and development and are urging upon us any of several intellectual and social divergences as being alone in harmony with the spirit of the age.

Like the rediscovery of religion, this is by no means a new activity of the human spirit; it is, rather, one of the recurrent habits of eager and unsatisfied minds. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, describing to his mother the Commencement exercises of the Cambridge Divinity School, in 1845, wrote that “Elderly ministers sniffed at radical sentiments, young ones smiled at conservative ditto, and Theodore Parker sneered . . . at a severe criticism on Strauss.”²

¹ Hutton, *The Proposal of Jesus*, p. 76. George H. Doran Company.

² Higginson, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, p. 4. Houghton Mifflin Company.

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It reads like the Commencement exercises of any theological school to-day.

For undoubtedly there is a lure in what we think may be heresy. The spirit of curiosity and independence which once drove men to sail strange seas and dare strange lands now finds its outlook and adventure in the attempt on strange ideas. It was once the vogue to seek a new route to India; it is now more or less the fashion to seek a new route to truth. Like Keats' watcher of the skies, our generation seems to be looking for new notional planets, or, after the manner of the Ancient Mariner, would be the first to burst into some silent sea of novel faith. The difficulty about the business—not always recognized at once—is that one cannot be invariably sure that what he has discovered is what he thinks it is. One of the traditions cherished by a certain theological seminary class is of an occasion when a bold student disagreed with the professor of systematic theology on a morning when, apparently, the theological temper was in too delicate a balance. The student prefaced his disagreement with the professor's dictum by remarking, "I am afraid, sir, that I am a heretic at this point," to which the professor replied with no little acerbity, "You need have no fear; you are not a heretic, you are merely a fool."

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It is due to the memory of a great man who was a gentleman in spite of temperamental defects, that immediately he proffered his apology. Nevertheless, his sharp language may be recalled to warn us of a peril too little appreciated in these brave days of exaggerated liberty and confidence; for one of the disturbing elements in the religious confusion of the present time is that there are propagandists announcing as new and revolutionary truths, what not infrequently are little more than philosophical, political, and social follies formerly abandoned in the careful march of faith and life.

Apart from this more easy danger of mistaking the intellectual debris of former days for unmined deposits of future wealth, there is the more constant and subtle peril of a mistaken attitude toward orthodoxy itself. Because certain minds within the church have refused to learn that truth is a unity, and so have rejected the disclosures of science and the lessons of history; because certain minds within the church insist upon a mechanical theory of biblical inspiration, an indefensible method and an indiscriminating literalism in biblical interpretation; and with the noise of a trumpet and the sound of many words seem to assume and assert that they, alone, are orthodox, we are in danger, in our revulsion of spirit, of

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discarding the reality which they so stubbornly and ignorantly libel. What if this rigid literalism were, itself, the most fatal heterodoxy?

At this point, however, it may be well to inquire as to the permanent values of a great tradition, and of the heroisms which have gone to its making, and their worth for the times that follow. One of our ready axioms is that the heretics of to-day are the prophets of to-morrow; but at the same time we are likely to forget that to-day's conservatives may have been yesterday's radicals. Is their radicalism, so dearly bought in their day of battle, to go for nothing now? Must spiritual courage be contemporaneous in order to have meaning? If the history of the progress of truth would teach us that the new views men repudiate so violently to-day may be their creed to-morrow, it also asks us whether we can welcome the novelty of to-day and abandon lightly the innovation which saved our yesterday. Is a heretic's vision worthless after it has been generally accepted, and a prophet authentic only in the hour of his rejection? Was Christ less credible when the empire of Constantine acknowledged him than he was when the empire of Tiberius crucified him?

There is no lack of challenge in the past, for occasions have not been wanting when, while

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the present was a monotony and the future offered but recurrent tedium, it was the past which contained the excitement that germinated a new world. To the men of the fifteenth century, as some one has remarked, the classics were the only possible vehicle of that spirit which, from time to time, rediscovers that the True and the Beautiful are living values; and to be a classical scholar at that time was to be, not a conservative but a revolutionary. So an old highway not infrequently becomes a new road, and an abandoned path presents adventure on every hand.

When we remember, moreover, that it is not simply our minds but our lives that depend upon what we believe, is it not as thrilling to risk them upon "the moral judgment of the dead" as upon the confident presumptions of the living? Bearing in mind the pre-Ptolemaic theory of the universe amid which orthodox Christianity arose, the centuries without science and without democracy through which it has come, the savageries which have been committed in its name, the tyrannies which have been identified with it, the wars which it has inspired, the vested wrongs which it has protected, is there not as much danger, is there not as much excitement, is there not as great a demand for courage, in building one's life upon it now, as in

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following the most clamorous and progressive doctrine of the present day? "The gospel," wrote Silvester Horne, "is more than a great faith; it is a great adventure."³ In these days of turbulence of mind and trial of spirit; amid these contemporary moods that reject discipline and abuse liberty and already threaten to change democracy from an exercise of obligation into the indulgence of irresponsible crowd passions, it is to be contended that, for the religious mind and life, the historic Christian tradition speaks, not the dullness of an exhausted interest, but the appeal of a difficult and perilous adventure.

I

When, now, we speak with any degree of friendliness of this word "orthodoxy," we have to be as wise as serpents in order to convince a good many people that we are not as harmless as doves, for to such people orthodoxy means nothing more modern or congenial than what was believed by queer-minded Christians not later than fifteen hundred years ago. Not a few men and women of what is called the modern spirit apparently are of the opinion that orthodox Christianity comprises nothing outside of the fourth-century creeds, though

³ Horne, *The Romance of Preaching*, p. 193. Fleming H. Revell Company.

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there are some more enlightened souls who go so far as to include the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church, or, if they are Methodist, the Twenty-five which John Wesley considered sufficient for the guidance of his American societies. The truth may be stated in this fashion: that the historic creeds are orthodox, but they are not orthodoxy; because of which there are, very roughly discriminated, two views of them, equally mistaken, and perhaps equally unfortunate in their effect upon our actual religious thought and life.

The first view is that the historic creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene, the Confessions of Augsburg and of Westminster, the Articles of Religion, and the like, are timeless and unchanging in their values and imperatives, to be held

“ as an infant's hand
Holds purposeless whatso is placed therein.”

When Andover Seminary was founded, for example, in 1807, those fine Congregational leaders who established it introduced their enterprise with a creed which, they wrote, should be “as permanent as the sun and stars forever.” But that creed, instead of lasting forever, as a professor in that seminary has reminded us, was a dead letter within about seventy-five years. Such a conception of the creeds is but one step worse than that of the

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verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and the mathematical interpretation of Daniel and the Apocalypse, according to which men and women in every age have been sure that the end of the world was immediately at hand. Whatever the historic creeds have been or now are, they are not the last word in the language of a living faith.

Beside this mistaken view is another as far in error, though in the opposite direction. It is the view which relegates the creeds to a purely temporary and now outgrown usefulness, and bids us who live in a day so much later and so different from theirs, consider them as curious inheritances from a vanished era, like fossils in the rocks or the colonnades of Palmyra. Perhaps those comparisons are too dignified, for was it not Henry Ward Beecher who said that creeds are like birds' nests; they give a place to rest, but, like birds' nests, should be pulled down and built new every year? The answer to that epigram is easy and immediate: creeds which are as temporary as birds' nests will present results as impermanent as birds. It was no birds'-nest creed that produced Saint Peters, or the Puritan commonwealth, or the Letter to the Romans.

Which is not to say that the historic creeds had not a value and meaning peculiar to their

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own times, a value and meaning which they have not had since. In fact, even the most creedless-minded critic would be guilty of less irrelevant and loose reflection on the fourth-century formulas if he should come to an understanding of the service which those formulas rendered the fourth-century life. By the time of that century the once-compelling principles of authority one by one had broken down. There had been the principle upon which Greek and Latin civilization had been erected, of hereditary monarchy; that had gone. There had been the republican principle of authority as expressed through the Roman Senate; that had crumbled. There had been the Asiatic principle of authority incarnate in a deified emperor; that had failed in the East and had proven impossible in the West. Meanwhile the age and the empire were swept with wars and revolutions. The ancient class distinctions, which had given stability to an earlier society, had melted, and the Barbarians were pouring in. The old traditions, the protecting laws, the bewildered government, and the private interests of men, were all alike precarious and impotent. It was in such an age, at Nicea, that human thought once more grew firm and fixed in the doctrine of God. Out of the theological subtleties at which Car-

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lyle railed with more noise than knowledge there issued, as a no less authoritative student than the historian Ferrero has suggested, the unity and stability of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, which unity and stability were "the last foundation of order in the world which, because of the impossibility of finding a sure and certain principle of authority, was falling into disintegration."⁴ It is to be remarked, in passing, that a comparison of that age and our own will disclose startling similarities of tendency and spirit, and will suggest that the spiritual and social confusion amid which the church and society find themselves to-day so helpless may be not unconnected with the practical repudiation of creedal values and loyalty which has marked the generation to which we belong.

But having said this much about the creeds, it is not meant by orthodoxy and our adventure on it that an attempt is to be made to force our present-day religious experience and conviction to express themselves in those ancient phraseologies. We could never do that, for the simple reason that we cannot think in the same circumstances of philosophical controversy, classical tradition, and scientific imma-

⁴ Ferrero, *The Ruin of Ancient Civilization and the Triumph of Christianity*, p. 166. Courtesy of G. P. Putnam's Sons, Publishers, New York and London.

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turity, in which those earlier Christians thought; the circumstances, in other words, in which the creeds were formulated. Nor are we yet prepared to write the consensus of present-day religious experience and conviction in any similar succinct and formal statement of faith; because, in our day of philosophical liberality, of revolt from tradition, and of enormous scientific advance, we cannot immediately think, as they thought religiously, in terms of adequate precision and grasp. To the making of those great formulas had gone at least three centuries of uninterrupted intellectual concentration upon the Christian doctrines as they were being tested against pagan philosophy and the conduct of a difficult personal and social life. But we have largely lost the genius, because we have turned aside from the practice, of thoroughgoing and comprehensive religious thinking. For two generations at least we have been concentrating our thought upon the disclosures of science, upon the application of machinery to material production, and upon the implications and developments of democracy. Religion, until very recently, has been taken for granted, but not explored; or, at most, lived with personal fidelity but not intelligently searched for its sequences of profound and expanding truth. I do not forget our gener-

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ation's activities in the realms of historical criticism and psychology, as these have dealt with the documents, the institutions, and the phenomena of religion; but all of these have been investigations of natural causes rather than appraisals of spiritual reality and discrimination. They have made us familiar with the natural; they have not made us intellectually at home with the supernatural, so that we can find no better invitation to the adventure of orthodoxy than that in the words of Ignatius: "Let us learn to think according to Christianity."

In short, we are back, if not at the beginning, at least at the decisive point in our adventure, at the simple, exact meaning of the word "orthodoxy" itself, namely, right teaching; which involves, first of all, right thinking; and right thinking may be vastly different from yet every bit as dramatic as that new thinking which seems so much more congenial to the mood of to-day. John Bright, being reproached one day for having voted, in Parliament, against so great a thinker as John Stuart Mill, replied: "The worst of great thinkers is that they generally think wrong." It is an observation perhaps more epigrammatic than correct; but the social, political, and religious disorder of our present day makes it impossible to doubt that, however great may be some of

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the so-called thinking-for-the-times of which we have had much assurance, frequently it has been wrong thinking. Let us come back with Ignatius and think according to Christianity; let us set ourselves to think right.

II

What is the test of right thinking, what is the source of orthodoxy? The most daring and monumental answer has been that of the Nicene Creed itself. Whatever were the developments in Christian thought from Pentecost to the generation which saw the Council of Nicea, it will not be untrue to say that the Christians of those intervening centuries discovered orthodoxy in their Christian documents; in the writings of evangelists, the letters of apostles, the epistles and admonitions of presbyter and bishop. It was inevitable that, in some form, soon or late, the question should arise, Can there be so many repositories of right thinking, can there be so large and varied a literature of spiritual authority? The church replied with the fixed canon of the Scriptures and the formulated creed, and planted the seeds of that interminable discussion which has been vocal, in many a century since, over the seat of religious authority. We are passingly familiar with the

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outstanding episodes of that debate, asserting here that authority is in the church expressing itself through councils, declaring there that it is in the canonical Scriptures, and again protesting that it is the individual conscience to which the Scriptures have made their direct and effective appeal. The Scriptures, however, lost their automatic, semimagical influence when men realized how truly they are the product of human life, created by the church, and speaking to the experience of men because they are the record of other men's experiences. The church perhaps would have kept its place as authoritative had its decisions really been the decisions of the whole church. But it also failed as more and more they came to be the conclusions of a very small minority of the entire church, and of a minority which, though specialized in intellectual interests, was also narrowed and isolated in living experience. What really spoke through the Scriptures and through the church was life itself. A church council, it is true, formally determined what books should be contained in the Scriptures confirmed as the inspired Word of God; and from one point of view one could say with Dean Inge that such a decision was no more than a majority vote at a meeting. But that is not the whole truth. The majority vote at

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the meeting was making no new decision; it was registering the decision which the multitudinous experience of generations of Christians had already reached, as a result of their actual contact with these various books. The majority vote in the meeting recorded the conclusion of two hundred seventy-five years of Christian experience, that, in the illuminating remark of Bishop Edwin H. Hughes, "A book that is not inspiring cannot be proved to be inspired."⁵

It is from the complementary angle, and is more to the point now, because it contradicts a good deal of present-day opinion, to say that the individual conscience and enlightenment, the individual experience itself, cannot be the final test of right thinking, for they do not represent the conclusions of life but only the inferences of a very insignificant portion of life. This is an age of exaggerated individualism in which the obligation of the individual to be himself is very fiercely preached; but, as the late Principal Forsyth has said, there are so many people who want to be themselves more than to be right. We have to face the uncomfortable but inexorable fact that individualism in religious thinking is always suspect, and has generally been wrong, even when it displays the mechanical accuracies of logic and is sup-

⁵ Hughes, *The Bible and Life*, p. 25. The Methodist Book Concern.

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ported by unimpeachable conduct of personal life. The test of right thinking, the source of orthodoxy, is life in the large. You appraise a personal conviction, not by its effect upon the person holding the conviction, but by what the effect would be if all individuals held it. An atheist may be a patriot, and defend his atheism by urging his good citizenship; but an atheist is a good citizen because the overwhelming majority of citizens believe in God. A few men and women may indulge the emotional extravagance of "The Holy Ghost and Us" society, and the community maintain itself in dignity and reverence; but if all our neighbors were Holy Rollers, what would our neighborhood become? Calvinism has produced more than one of Mrs. Deland's John Ward, Preacher; but if any considerable number of its preachers at one time had been John Wards, Calvinism itself would have gone to wreck. Neither personal experience nor individual knowledge is absolute; they are always relative; and there is no word our present-day individualists in religion need more to heed than that exhortation which Oliver Cromwell once addressed to the Scotch: "I beseech you, in the tender mercies of the Lord, believe it possible that you may be mistaken."

Earlier in the chapter it was intimated that

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the adventure of orthodoxy would be difficult and perilous. We can begin here to glimpse something of the difficulty and feel, perhaps, the approach of its peril. We must think according to Christianity; and wherever we may find the materials for thought, we cannot discover orthodoxy itself, clear cut and unmistakable, in a book, however sacred; we cannot localize it in the formula of a church, however positive and even pertinent it may seem to be; we cannot apprehend it in the witness of conscience and our personal experience alone, however satisfying to us as individuals that witness may appear. Yet we have to discover it in experience and test it by some durable and definitive reality, historical as well as experimental, a standard without and a light within.

III

This seems now to forecast a vague if not a lame conclusion. It seems to promise no early, or even certain, City of Faith, bulwarked behind precise and guarded formulas, in which, to mix the figure, we can say to our soul, "Take thine ease." We are pilgrims and sojourners in this, as in the other quests of life; and we seek a city, we do not possess one. The bulwarked structures of fixed and settled faith which men have built in the past, and in which they

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thought to dwell securely, have, one by one, proved to be little more than lodgings for a night, left far behind in the unceasing march of inquiry and experience. Though Stevenson's observation that to travel hopefully is better than to have arrived, may conceivably be subject to revision as a final philosophy, it cannot be denied that it reflects the experiences of life. Thinking according to Christianity is to think right, not to come to the end of thought.

But vague as the conclusion may threaten to be, there are several considerations which will suggest a saving and productive definiteness. First, Christian orthodoxy will not attempt to explain or answer the needs of our present day as if our day itself stood isolated and alone, nor to meet its problems considered wholly by themselves. A day or an age is but an incident in the procession of humanity, and we have to look before and after if we would see life, or even our own time, whole. During the epidemic of 1918, among the expedients inaugurated for the protection of the population by the Board of Health of a certain American city, was an order that at the public services of the churches only alternate rows of pews should be occupied. As a result, every other row of pews was packed with worshipers, while the rows between

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displayed their aching emptiness in the interest of the public health. But the order was rescinded after the first Sunday of its execution, when the pulpit observation of one of the ministers was reported, to the effect that the Board of Health evidently believed that the germs could not jump sideways. It is even a more ludicrous state of mind to conceive that living truth has, so to speak, only lateral relationships; and that one can deal intelligently with contemporary interests while ignoring alike the witness of the past and the admonitions of the future. The adventure of a vital orthodoxy will be an approach, not alone to the spirit of the age, but, recalling Dean Inge's fine contrast, to the Spirit of the Ages, a much more difficult and productive enterprise. It will be an exploration, not of the conveniences of a generation, but of the continuities of life. Mr. Glen Frank, in an address delivered in the spring of 1922, uttered his belief "that a vast fresh advance of the human soul is about to be made, a world-wide dream of a vast moral renewal is simmering beneath the confusion and ill of our time. That is," he went on to say, "the raw materials for such a Renaissance are lying all about us throughout Western Civilization." Doubtless one may be uncertain as to how a dream simmers, but few of us will deny that

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the dream is there; and none can long disbelieve that the materials for such a Renaissance as Mr. Frank predicts are lying all about us. However, our fresh advance will not be an explosion; it will be a growth. It will not isolate the materials of to-day from all other days; it will fuse them with the stuff of all our yesterdays, and our advance of soul will be a development and not a departure. The New Testament itself shows changes, as Doctor Moffatt has remarked, but "they are the changes of a movement which preserves its identity."⁶

On the other hand, Christian orthodoxy will not reject the contributions of the most modern experience and insight; and that the present age has its particular contribution to make to the substance of religious thinking and to the manner of its expression ought to be too obvious even to need mention. An age which has discovered the empty spaces to be filled with laboring energies lifting to the winds its winged ships, which has found the silent atmospheres to be a riot of melody and rhythm, which has explored a universe of ceaseless forces whirling in the atom of an atom, which has appraised the coordinated mysteries of mind and feeling,

⁶ Moffatt, *The Approach to the New Testament*, p. 28. George H. Doran Company.

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and now surveys a reckonable world within the enigma of personality; an age which dares the last experiment in human freedom, and risks its civilization on the instincts of the unenlightened man—such an age has wealth of new knowledge with which to enrich the most opulent tradition, and wealth of experience with which to challenge the most confident. Passing events, it has been very wisely said, are only important in so far as they are *not* passing; and what age has had more numerous or greater factors of permanence in its characteristic events than ours? Underneath the flow of changing modern moods and passions, underneath the expediencies of an order whose imperfections doom themselves to evanescence, are enduring realities of knowledge, experience, and ideal. Behind the transitory ebullitions of the spirit of our age, the Spirit of the Ages maintains unstayed its solemn process, as beneath the burgeonings of spring which fade and fall persists the growing permanence of the tree. Modern science must modify our conception of the supernatural; modern psychology must bring new light to our understanding of religious experience; modern democracy must appropriately change our ideas of God. But too commonly we have cherished the feeling, sometimes have made it a measurable boast,

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that in accomplishing these alterations of belief and attitude we have cut ourselves off from an outworn past; a past in which orthodoxy, like a prison, still incarcerates the primitive minded, while the freedoms of the spirit, the amplitudes of the inquiring intelligence, the quickening winds of productive curiosity, belong wholly to our isolated area of thinking which, we compliment ourselves, is revolt and heresy. To the contrary, living orthodoxy rejects none of these gifts of faith or experience or opportunity which the latest hour may bring. It simply appraises every gift in respect of its value, not alone in itself, but also in relation to the vast and ordered continuity of truth as it has been tested and effective through the corporate experience of all Christian men.

It is this which makes what has been called the romance of orthodoxy; a romance which Gilbert Chesterton has suggested in a paragraph describing how the church, as he says, "left on the one hand the huge bulk of Arianism, buttressed by all the worldly powers to make Christianity too worldly. The next instant she was swerving to avoid an Orientalism which would have made it too unworldly."⁷ That devious and daring course of orthodoxy can be observed throughout the entire history

⁷ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 186. Dodd, Mead & Company.

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of the church. The seventeenth century, for example, saw the pride, the power, the success of Calvinism, and in the light of the service which Calvinism was rendering, it would have been comparatively easy for the whole church to have surrendered to it, and, ultimately, to have lost the gospel of hope in a predestinarian pessimism worse than pagan fate. It would have been comparatively easy, in the light of desolated and desolating social conditions, for the church to have surrendered, at one time or another, to the hysterias of premillennialism, with its superficial loyalty to Christ and its fundamental and comfortable selfishness. To have fallen into any one of these spiritual obsessions, to quote Chesterton again, "from gnosticism to Christian Science, would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure."⁸

So we reach one more inquiry: Have we, then, no fixed and certain *terminus a quo*; and have we no durable equipment of the mind by which, as by a compass, to guide our adventure? The question, thus phrased, is awkward, but the answer is immediate and sure; we have both the *terminus a quo* and the durable equipment of the mind, namely, those data of the

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 186f.

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supernatural which lie at the heart of the gospel, which Christian life as well as Christian theology has always acknowledged as the foundation of its complex and variegated structure. "If religion is to change us, we must be overcome by facts which we cannot help believing and the realization of which alters everything."⁹ On the least possible reckoning these are the facts with which we have to do: the self-consciousness of Jesus, the redemptive meaning of his death, the consummating mystery of his resurrection. These are the facts on which, from the first, Christianity has stood. They may be inexplicable but they are inescapable. They may be contradictory, but they are inevitable. You cannot get rid of them and retain Christianity. It is admitted that with them it is difficult to explain the world to-day or the position of Christianity in it; but without them it is impossible to explain Christianity at all.

It is at this point that much sincere modern thinking fails; it does not realize the inexorableness of these facts, not simply for the past, but for the present as well. Mr. Glen Frank, to cite again the address to which reference was made on a preceding page, said that the church

⁹ Mackintosh, *The Divine Initiative*, p. 48. Student Christian Movement of Great Britain and Ireland.

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cannot furnish the leadership for the spiritual renaissance which he feels is at hand, until it shall "have the courage to substitute the 'religion of Jesus' for 'Christianity.'" If he means by "Christianity" those stereotyped forms of organization, the divisive formulas which have produced sects, the narrowing and exclusive nonessentials which have too greatly occupied the religious enterprise, his remark may be true. But thoughtful men do not usually conceive of Christianity in that way. If he means by "the religion of Jesus" the transforming conception of God and life which flows from the historic faith that Jesus is the incarnation of God, his remark may be true. But the phrase is not usually employed to express that conception. In its customary significance, "the religion of Jesus" would be possible only to those who have the experience and consciousness of Jesus. The religion of Jesus would be possible only to those who cannot be convicted of sin, who can declare that themselves and the Father are one, who can say that to have seen them is to have seen God. Jesus, for instance, needed no Redeemer because he had nothing from which to be redeemed; but men and women who know the malignance of their own transgressions fix their hope on One who was bruised for their iniquities.

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Jesus, moreover, claimed the cross as an integral part of his duty, and those closest to him both in time and thought declared it to be their own deliverance. The Son of man, he said, came not to live his life, but to lose it, not to give his career as an example, but to give himself as a ransom. The testimony of the New Testament, studied in perspective, is that the religion which Jesus *had* would do for him, but only the religion which he *is* will do for any one else. In order to substitute the religion of Jesus for Christianity, if the phrases are to be taken in their usual meaning, Mr. Frank will first have to discredit the witness of Jesus himself and deny the experience and confession of those who were closest to him. In other words, he will reconstruct Christianity by rejecting its facts.

As has already been remarked, these data of the supernatural on which Christianity from the first has stood, are inexplicable and may be construed as contradictory. They are an order of paradox rather than of agreement, and inveigle the reason rather than satisfy it. Because of that fact the historic creeds, which we had thought we had left far behind us, are still our living, if not mentally congenial, contemporaries, for they are the most impregnable and majestic correlations of those para-

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doxes which have yet been made. We cannot take them as the completed expression of total Christian experience or faith; we shall doubtless come some time to more modern and friendly formulas; we may very likely reach Professor Ellwood's ideal of a more rational, revitalized, and socialized Christianity, but we shall never come to any simpler creed, for we cannot make a simpler creed which will contain all the facts.¹⁰

¹⁰ Compare Figgis, *Civilization at the Cross Roads*, p. 195.

CHAPTER V

THROUGH CREDENCE TO CREED

IN the preceding chapter it has been said that there are certain data of the supernatural which are at once the heart of Christian faith and the foundation of Christian theology and life, namely, the self-consciousness of Jesus, the redemptive meaning and value of his death, and the consummating mystery of his resurrection. It was said further that while these data of the supernatural may be contradictory, they are inescapable; you cannot get rid of them and still have Christianity. The conclusion was drawn, accordingly, that while it is not improbable that we shall come, soon or late, to new statements of Christian belief, new phraseologies of our creeds, we can never come to any creed simpler than these which we now possess, because no simpler creed would include all the facts.

This, of course, can have no other meaning than that the great historical confessions are not the final expressions of Christian conviction and faith; and, in fairness, the question immediately raised when anything of the kind is suggested, must be answered: the question

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whether these ancient creeds, which the church so long has affirmed, must be done away. It is a pertinent and vital question, though one has to be precise in what one means by doing away with the creeds. In a very real sense they can never be done away with, just as no instrument, institution, or adventure of the human spirit, of any sort, which has served or led or enriched any area or epoch of human life, can be done away with, though it may have been long superseded in practice by some other instrument, institution, or enterprise amplified and adjusted to the enlarging knowledge and capacity of later generations. We can never be done with that clumsy motor now in the National Museum, which failed and fell with Langley's unsuccessful flying machine, although it is an awkward impossibility compared with the marvels of compression, power, and speed which drive our modern airplanes. We can never be done with those barren school-rooms of the seventeenth century, and the austere teachers who, amid the rigors of suffering, the alarms of savages, and the loneliness of a new land, sternly taught the children of the Plymouth colony the rudiments of knowledge, however poor and limited they seem beside our articulated public school system of to-day. We can never be done with the Magna Charta,

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notwithstanding that, as a statement of present-day democracy, property rights, and social justice, it is hopelessly inadequate. We can never be done with Plato's Republic, although its conception of liberty violates the deeper and more dominant convictions of our common social morality to-day. All of these have durable significance and value. They were the answer of their age to the challenge, the need, the capacity, the character of their contemporary life. Without them we would neither have nor be all that we now possess and are. From them developed the superiorities we consider peculiarly our own. They were indispensable and adequate in their own times, and they contained the germinal realities from which have been evolved those ampler instruments that meet the larger knowledge and necessities of our present world. So these historic creeds: they are the church's answer to the challenge of the day in which they were formulated. The young church, for instance, found itself faced by that semi-religion, semi-philosophy known to history as gnosticism; an Asiatic mysticism which believed in good gods and bad gods in competition, and in gods of different degrees; which refused to receive the Old Testament as sacred literature, and accepted only parts of the New Testament; which denied the deity of

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Jesus and lost practical piety in mystical speculation, and yet claimed to be Christian faith and theology adapted to pagan thought. In answer the church produced the Apostles' Creed, with its "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"—one supreme creative God; "and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord"—one supreme Incarnation. Later the growing church found itself interrogated by still other and divergent beliefs. Here was a group of ascetics, followers, as they affirmed, of the historic Jesus, but conceiving him as a prophet like Moses, calling them back to a primitive Judaism. Here were more subtle Unitarian thinkers, claiming to be Christians, but denying the reality of the personal Son and the Spirit and declaring that Father, Son and Spirit were but alternate manifestations of the one God. Here were others who claimed that Jesus was but a man who had been deified. It would have been neither difficult nor surprising for the church to have accepted any of these beliefs, but it would have been fatal. To have accepted any of them would have meant for Christianity to sink back into Judaism, on the one hand, or paganism on the other. So the church replied with the great creed of Nicea:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible; and

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in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Only Begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of the same substance with the Father, by whom all things were made in heaven and in earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate, was made man, suffered, rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and He will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost."

That answered the challenge the church faced in those great fourth-century days. We can never be done with that, in fact or in value, nor cut ourselves completely off from the gigantic men—nameless as they may be—who shaped those majestic sentences as the literary expression of inexpressible truth, just as we can never cut ourselves completely off from the men who, in that humble upper room in Philadelphia, phrased their passion for reasonable freedom in the Declaration of Independence and, later, in the Constitution of the new republic. But our American democracy has not remained within the original definitions of either of those imperishable documents. The Declaration, laying down as its premise that all men are created free and equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with the inalien-

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able rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, was written and signed by men who bought, owned, and sold slaves. During a period of one hundred thirty-four years the Constitution has been found to be inadequate for the expression of a growing democratic ideal no less than nineteen times, and its inadequacies have been corrected by amendments. While supplementing and defining still more concretely the content of the democratic conception of society, of which the Constitution was the original expression, State constitutions, municipal charters, and Congressional and legislative acts prescribe rights, privileges, prohibitions, restraints, and duties of which the makers of the Constitution never dreamed, because the realities of enlarging democratic society which have called forth these prescriptions were beyond their experience.

When it is said, then, that doubtless we shall some time come to new phraseologies of our Christian belief and conviction, what is meant is that Christian thought, the Christian Church, when it shall have appraised and reorganized the new and multiplying factors of contemporary life, must speak to the present day those supernatural facts of Christianity, as commandingly and pertinently as Christian thought, the Christian Church, through the

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historic creeds spoke them, to the days whose needs and challenge those historic creeds met. How, then, shall we who will not write any new creed, but must have one for ourselves, discover it?

I

The answer to that question is fairly obvious. We shall come to our creed to-day as the makers of these ancient confessions came to them. Our distinctive materials of faith may be somewhat different, but their source is the same, namely, life lived in the conviction of and venture on those data of the supernatural which lie at the heart of essential Christianity. This presupposes the reasonable and religious attitude toward tradition—that it is a loyalty to the spirit of the creative past, not a duplication of its letter. “That good thing” which was committed unto Timothy to be guarded through the Holy Spirit was not a formal thesis, but a living truth. We shall remain true to the faith of the fathers, not as we maintain that faith unchanged in its specific phraseologies and definitions, but as we bring to our life and time the spirit of inquiry, of honesty, of loyalty to truth, of practical daring in belief, which they brought to their life and time; as we set the indispensable facts of Christianity, not any temporal forms, in the center of our life as they

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set them in the center of their life; as we appraise and define the meaning of Christianity in relation to our knowledge and social development, as they appraised and defined it in relation to their knowledge and social development. For the Christians of the first century did not begin, as most of us have begun, with a creed ready made to their hand. They began with Christ, not as a doctrine but as a Person, not in a theology but in a fellowship. The Hebrews and Gentiles who became Christians after Jesus, in bodily and visible form, had gone from the earth, those who, perhaps more surely than Saint Paul, had never known Christ after the flesh, were nevertheless won by a contact of life rather than by an appeal to the intellect. In Paul's difficult but unmistakable phrase, Christ was revealed *in* them rather than *to* them. They did not so much meditate and analyze and argue for his deity, his redemptive death, and the pledge of immortality in his resurrection; to paraphrase Browning's question, they gave these facts their vote to be true and conducted life upon their truth. They lived as men and women who had been redeemed by the Son of God and were sure of eternal life. In other words, the Christians before the creeds had an experience. Scholars, slaves, publicans, priests, fishermen, physicians, living

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in queens' palaces or the ghettos of intolerant cities, individually experienced that in Christ they were new creatures. They knew that they had passed from death unto life. While they were yet sinners Christ had died for them, and sin had no more dominion over them. In their sufferings they discovered that his grace was sufficient for them, in their weakness that his strength was made perfect. Whatever may have been the process by which, as latter-day scholarship tells us, the idea of Jesus was developed into that of Lord, the Christians of the New Testament and the generations immediately following were not concerned with the development of the idea; they were dominated by the fact. It was the love of Christ, not any theory of Christ, which constrained them.

They had also—though far too little has been made of it in latter-day thinking—more than individual experience. Neither a few men nor a multitude of them, having only separated individual experiences, if such a condition can be imagined, could ever account for historical Christianity nor move toward the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth. The early Christians, from the beginning, found themselves not only in new relations to God, but also in new relations to one another. They recognized their redemption in and by Christ

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not only as making them individually new creatures, but as giving them new connections. It not simply transfigured their experiences; it transformed their social activities. It can hardly be considered an accident that the word "saint" never appears in the singular in the New Testament, but always in the plural. It is among a plurality of saints that the great manifestations of the Divine Presence are made—the demonstration of Pentecost, the descents of the Holy Spirit, the shaking of the place of prayer, the renewed boldness of the proclamation of the word of God, the signs and wonders which furnished the credentials of the apostolic power.

Of course experience of this kind involved very real faith. Men and women did not come to a sense of salvation from sin, of sustaining grace from and in Christ, of certain hope of immortality, without believing, in a very real way, some definite things about the Christ through whom they claimed the experience. But it was what might be called an instinctive faith; it did not inquire what was involved beyond the faith itself. The men who, for example, found themselves to be new creatures in Christ Jesus, believed themselves to be redeemed; but they did not first ask for or possess a theory of atonement. The men and

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women who called Jesus Lord did not stop to inquire what was the relation of the human Jesus to the metaphysical Trinity. They did not begin by asking for explanations of an hypothesis; they began by risking their lives upon their confidence in Jesus. Their faith was in a fact which they were living to demonstrate, not in a description of it which they were arguing to defend. So that there is nothing at which to be surprised in the circumstance that the New Testament, while it is full of the materials out of which theological dogmas and philosophical creeds have been made, itself is peculiarly free from them. Untrained men and women, rather isolated from the main currents of contemporary intellectual and social life, but with a common experience of unprecedented personal meaning, would naturally rejoice in the facts of the experience rather than attempt to define them. It is the actualities of life which are of primary significance, and while those actualities will eventually express themselves in a formula, the formula can never precisely describe the life which moves beneath it. "No creed has ever been framed so grim that sweet and saintly souls have not professed it, nor so kindly that it has not harbored sinners."¹

¹ Thayer, *Democracy, Discipline and Peace*, p. 37. Houghton Mifflin Co.

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This priority of religious experience which has already been pointed out; this staking of life, with its social consequences, upon the data of the supernatural which lie at the foundations of Christianity—in a word, this necessity of Christian experience as the authentic source of a Christian creed—is all the more to be emphasized to-day because some of those who are prescribing reconstructions of faith seem to exhibit little material for the work. There are many contemporary suggestions as to the theology which we must formulate for the present social order, and not a few demands that the church shall produce a modernized creed which the industrial world will accept; all of which is attractive in language but rather inaccurate of insight. A social order cannot possibly have any theology and the industrial world is unable to accept anything. These are convenient generalizations without specific reality. One might as well insist that a species should have color or architecture shape. Men and women of the present social order can possess a theology, and industrialists, both employers and employees, both capitalists and union leaders, can accept a creed; for possessing and accepting are the activities of individuals. But they cannot do either as an initial enterprise. Be-

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fore a creed can become a standard of personal belief it has to be discovered as a description of personal experience. A creed is not something you believe in, it is something which tells what you do believe in. Before men and women of the present social order can possess a theology they must confess religion; before industrialists can accept a Christian creed they will have to adventure upon Christ. Professor Ellwood writes that he would find "the religion needed by the modern world in a more rational, revitalized, socialized Christianity." But the sentence means nothing whatever unless that Christianity is, first of all, the experience and expression of more rational, revitalized, and socialized Christians. A creed has no evangelistic character. It explains to the intellect that evangelism upon which the will has already adventured. It is a bulwark of defense, not a weapon of attack. It safeguards a faith already occupied; it does not win recruits by creating faith. The Arians passed out of history, not because they were converted by the creed which survives with the name of Athanasius, but because the experience out of which they drew their Arianism was too small a fragment of the complete reality which was to be experienced in Christ. A durable creed can be erected only upon an amplitude of

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experience. A living creed, in short, is impossible except as the expression of a living faith; and faith, as Kirsopp Lake has written, in somewhat different associations, is not belief in spite of evidence, but life in scorn of consequences.

II

Thus far this discussion has dealt with these early Christians as living their lives wholly by themselves which, of course, they could not long have done. Their experience could not be maintained in isolation, untouched by the influences which moved around it. Those Christians were constantly in contact with a theory and mode of life totally different from their own. We read with little more than incidental interest that page in the book of Acts describing the scene as Paul ceases his ministry to the Jews, to whom, heretofore, he has confined his preaching, and turns to the Gentiles with the gospel of Christ. For all our indifference, however, that day the religious history of the world was directed into new channels. For Christianity did not make great progress in Palestine, the land, and among the Hebrews, the people, in and among whom it was born. It flourished among foreigners and on alien soil. There are no quarrels like family quarrels and no antagonisms so inflexible as those

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between brothers; so Judaism waged unrelenting war upon Christianity, though the promise of Christ was written indelibly on every page of her Sacred Scriptures, and her age-long expectation was of the coming of One who, when he came to his own, his own received him not. It was in Greek lands and among Greek-speaking pagans that early Christianity won its epoch-making victories, as the Christian disciples, scattered abroad by persecutions, went everywhere preaching the gospel.

Once established as a force to be reckoned with, once commanding the allegiance of many lives and proving its power in the regeneration of personal character and the reformation of social conduct, the world amid which it moved and within which it wrought its demonstrations, challenged it to explain itself, its experience, its outlook upon life, the motive sources of its courage, its joy, its endurance, its purposes and hopes. And that is a challenge which faces Christianity at every stage in the history of the world since the Nazarenes disturbed the peace of official Jerusalem. That scene wherein the two disciples are surrounded by the rulers and elders and scribes and the high priest and his colleagues—the political, the religious, and the social leadership of the Jewish world—and are asked, as the author of Acts reports, “By

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what power, or in what name, have ye done this?" is the figure of the church, in every century, summoned by the life of the world around it to give a reason for its claim, its position and its purposes. So the Greek world to which Christianity had gone and in which, for two hundred years, it had won its way against racial prejudice, religious tradition, intellectual contempt, and imperial arms, questioned it. What did it believe? What had it to declare concerning the profound realities of the soul and the soul's career through time?

Of course the heart of the whole challenge was the Person of Christ. The fundamental question, fundamental both to Christianity and to the inquiry of the world of the fourth century, was as to the relation of God and Jesus Christ. Was he a man? Was he a superior but not supreme creation? Was he truly God? One can easily apprehend how such questions would expand in the course of years into a great characteristic inquisition by contemporary thought; and the church, through its intellectual and spiritual leaders, carefully appraising the inquiry, had to answer. It had to answer, moreover, in terms which the Greek mind of the time could understand; which means that it had to express Christian realities to minds

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that had no Christian vocabulary or pre-Christian preparation of outlook. The answer which might have met the questionings of the Jew would leave the Greek untouched. To the Jew the Christian apologist could quote the Old Testament, for Jesus' God was the God of his Hebrew fathers, his sacred books were the sacred books his Jewish kindred had revered and read for a thousand years, the divine tradition at which his growing mind had kindled was the heroic story of his people's mighty past and majestic piety. Its prophets had inspired his enthusiasm, its psalmists had sustained his devotion, its seers had wakened and colored his hopes. But the Greek was a stranger to that entire mode and mood of thought. His gods, popularly conceived, were little better than himself; stronger, more knowing, yet not infallible nor secure against human cunning; immortal, but supermen rather than ineffably divine. Seriously considered, they were symbols of the divine reality which existed behind them.

To put it in a word, the Jew thought of God as a Person ruling over the universe of men and matter; the Greek thought of God as Substance, somehow permeating the universe of men and matter; and one of the initial difficulties which Christianity had to meet was that of finding

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words, in the materialistic vocabulary of the Greeks, with which to express spiritual ideas quite foreign to the Greek mind. The church had to explain the personal Christ to the Greek world that thought of God as substance rather than a personality. So we get the magnificent but, to us, almost incomprehensible language of Nicene Creed:

“We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Only Begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of the same substance with the Father.”

That was the answer of the Christian Church to the intellectual challenge of the Greek world of 325 A. D. in respect of the person of Christ. In the words of Canon Gore, the church passed “from holding her faith simply as a faith, to holding it with a clear consciousness of its intellectual meaning and limits, with ready formulas and clearly-worked-out terminology.”²

That answer, however, would have meant nothing to the twelve disciples with Jesus at Cæsarea Philippi. All they needed, as the explanation of their experience and the faith created by it, were the simple words of Peter to Jesus, “Thou art the Christ.” But the simple

² Gore, *The Incarnation of Our Lord*, p. 95. Charles Scribner's Sons.

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statement which satisfied the disciples with Jesus in his days among men would have meant nothing to the Greeks three centuries later. Nevertheless, all that is in this complex and theological creed of the fourth century is contained in germ in Simon Peter's simple words as he looked into the face of Christ. The difference is a difference in the world and the mind to which Jesus had to be explained.

It is allowable now to say that the answer of the Nicene Creed means nothing of practical religious value to us to-day. We do not think of God either as ancient Hebrew religion thought of him or as he was conceived by ancient Greek philosophy. The Jew thought of God as a Person, dwelling in a place apart; when he was present with his people he visited them and came down. The Greek thought of God as substance behind the appearances that constitute our vision of the finite universe. We think of God as the immanent Spirit, living, feeling, acting, in the energies of the universe and the experiences of men. "Some one is calling where the winds are sighing; some one is moving where the leaves are rustling; some one is yearning toward the human heart where the waves are breaking on the shore."³ The Jew thought of God in terms of power, the

³ Morrison, *The Wearing of Glory*, p. 168. George H. Doran Company.

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Greek thought of him in terms of matter; we think of him in terms of character and life. There is a double significance in that as we consider Christ. On the one hand, it is through Christ that we have come to this nobler conception of God; and, on the other hand, it is in terms of this conception of God that we must realize anew the meaning of Christ for contemporary thought. Christ is God, and must be so interpreted after being so experienced, not in substance but in character, not in material but in life.

III

Here, then, to sum up what has been said, are these data of the supernatural which are the very heart of Christian faith: the self-consciousness of Jesus, his redemptive death, and the consummating mystery of his resurrection. Here also are these majestic declarations of the faith, developed through living upon those data, which the church made to the mind and experience of that early century to which these declarations were necessary. And here, now, is our own age, with its characteristic knowledge, its essential spirit, its ideal and habit of life, all so different from that of the centuries which called out these historic creeds; and this, our own age, is now challenging the church and Christianity, as the third and

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fourth centuries challenged the third and fourth century church and Christianity, to declare the meaning of its faith, to interpret its Christ and God in terms of the age itself. That is the demand now pressed upon organized Christianity from several directions and in various forms, which may be phrased as the demand for a living creed.

It is at this point that we can give some consideration to the remark which one invariably meets after any suggestion of revision or restatement of the traditional faith. Immediately one is reminded that with these ancient creeds the church has won its world and is winning still its victories for the gospel; why, therefore, should we seek for anything different? To that there are two replies: First, that in a very real and fundamental sense the church has never won anything with a creed; it wins its victories with its Christ. The creed, as was suggested earlier in the chapter, is not a weapon of attack; it is a bulwark of defense. But in another sense, of course, the creed has unmistakable value as a statement of the experience and certainty to which Christianity, through the church, invites the world it must win. The reason that these ancient creeds have so long maintained that value is that, until comparatively recently, the mind of the world which was

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interested in any sort of a creed, has been sympathetic with and fairly similar to the mind of the Greek world of fifteen hundred years ago. In other words, it has been philosophical rather than practical. Quite otherwise, now, the dominant interests of men to-day are practical. For illustration, to say nothing of the three thousand patents upon mechanical devices which are registered every month in the United States alone, of primary and fundamental inventions of the first rank, there have been almost twice as many made since 1800 as were made in all preceding time. Education offers corroborative witness. Down to our day it dealt with speculative, cultural, and literary concerns rather than with those of practical experience and utility; educators of to-day are in peril of going to quite the opposite extreme. Between the minds of the theologians of fifty years ago and those of fifteen hundred years ago there was not as much difference in viewpoint and interest as there is between the religious thinkers of to-day and those of the last generation. The intellectual life of the centuries preceding our own generation very largely occupied the realm inhabited by the creed makers of the philosophical past.

The second reply to be made to the invariable remark that it is with these ancient creeds the

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church is winning its world, is that, during recent years, neither the church nor the creeds have been winning the world. It is time that Christian men and women escaped from the optimism of sentimentality through which they see the nations of the world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord. Whether or not Dean Inge is correct in his declaration that true Christianity will never be acceptable to the majority because it is too stern and uncompromising, it is not to be doubted that the Christianity of the church to-day is not accepted by anything like a majority of the world. Christ has been making his way, through the evangelism of individuals, in limited and personal fashion, though not so triumphantly that the church can make capital of its effectiveness; but the world—its organized thought, its interrelated systems of scholarship, finance, statecraft, industry, culture, and society—has been only sentimentally influenced by the church of our generation, and is largely indifferent to its standards. The challenge to-day from alien civilizations and from alienated social, industrial, and intellectual life at home, is for a restatement of Christianity in commanding terms of modern experience and understanding.

This demand that Christianity shall be

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restated in terms of modern experience and understanding is not an arbitrary summons; the language with which religion has expressed its beliefs has always been forged in the fires of contemporary experience, has always been colored by the light of contemporary institutions, has always been delimited by contemporary knowledge of the natural world. Seventeen hundred years ago, for illustration, kings were absolute and war was without our modern discriminations between personal and national interests. So kings ransomed their captive princes by paying whatever sums were required. It was natural, in such a condition of society and thought, that the church's theory of the Atonement should be that Satan had captured mankind and that God gave the death of Christ as a ransom to Satan by which mankind was set at liberty. Fantastic as the theory seems to us, it has the dignity of being considered by Saint Augustine and defended by Origen. The central truth of Christianity is in the theory, but the form of it is due to the experience and habit of the age in which it rose. It is this inevitable influence of the age upon its forms of belief and expression which explains the incident, related by the author of *Painted Windows*, of "a Japanese who, after listening with corrugated brow to the painful exposition

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of a recent Duke of Argyll concerning the Trinity in Unity, and the Unity in Trinity, suddenly exclaimed with radiant face, 'Ah, yes, I see, a Committee.'"⁴

Protestantism is much concerned to-day with what it calls, to the point of wearisome reiteration, the crisis that confronts it; and apparently it seeks to meet whatever crisis there is with organizations, institutions, enterprises in foreign lands and among foreign-born populations at home, and with coordinated interventions in industrial and social affairs and operations. These are doubtless imperative; beyond question they prophesy more effective application of Christianity to everyday life. But they will remain fragmentary in character and impermanent in result until Protestantism shall enunciate anew the central facts of Christian faith from which it sustains its experience and by which it directs its purposes and hopes, and shall enunciate them so illumined and reinforced by the indubitable realities of contemporary experience and knowledge, that they shall command the mind and will and heart of men as the undeniable voice of living truth.

That sentence touches the circumference of

⁴ *Painted Windows*, p. 72. Courtesy of G. P. Putnam's Sons, Publishers, New York and London.

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a subject which might well occupy a volume; but a pathway into it may be suggested by repeating an implication remarked in an earlier chapter. The age of the creeds, as was already said, was an age of philosophy. Science was not yet born and democracy had not been dreamed. But our age is utterly controlled by and responsive to those very influences of science and democracy; and Christian truth which does not relate itself to them speaks a language our age cannot understand. Christian thinking and Christian propaganda must take their central facts, these data of the supernatural of which enough has been said, conceiving God as character and life, and Jesus, in his experience, his death, his resurrection, as God's revelation of himself, and must set those facts in the light of and agreeable to the experience of an age of science and democracy. That will be, not to set aside the ancient philosophical creeds, but to fulfill them, not to abandon the faith of the fathers, but to gather the fruits which the fathers planted and of which they partook, and which have sustained the life of believing men down all the centuries that have dreamed or thundered through the garden of the world.

To those particularly interested in homiletical values we seem to have reached a place of little immediate usefulness. We shall not write any

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new statements of the faith; we shall continue to live our lives with the narrowed interests and common activities of that broad obscurity in which is unobtrusively enacted the drama of innumerable mankind. But there are other than homiletic values to which we may profitably give consideration; and it is precisely in their narrowed interests and commonplace activities that contemporary men will make their contribution to that community of religious experience and apprehension which alone can inspire and sustain an adequate and timely creed. "The test of a religious faith lies in the kind of behavior it inspires and controls, and in the contribution it makes to human well-being."⁵ Men and women who know it is not their work to write a creed for the times have yet the obligation to adventure on a conduct of life and faith out of which, in the hands of others, the living creed eventually shall rise; and that is no small or easy labor. There is to-day the temptation to fear; there are the revivals of pagan faiths abroad and the indulgence of pagan morality at home; there is the apparently increasing unbelief, in practice at least, of the Christian world; the disregard of law, of ancient virtue and of justice. All of

⁵ Jones, *The Faith That Enquires*, p. 66. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

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these seem to menace the Christianity we have presumed to know and exemplify. But as John Milton put it, "So truth be in the field . . . we do injuriously to misdoubt her strength," and it is at once the opportunity and obligation of men to-day to live actually upon the truth of Christ and the God of character, purpose, and life whom we see in him. Christian faith has no meaning to-day unless men live their actual lives, with their annoyances, their difficulties, their irritating and profitless frictions, upon the truth of Christ and God that lies at the heart of the world. It seems to have been easy to do that in the simpler and unhurried generations past, when Simeon looked for the consolation of Israel or Saint Francis sang the Canticle of the Sun. It seems a very unpractical thing to attempt to-day. But it is precisely that which has to be accomplished if Christianity is to be permanently victorious in a good world; and it is not Christianity—which is as elusive and unreal as a social order or a species—it is Christians who are to win the world by lives whose secret the creed is to describe. It is of small importance whose shall be the gifted minds to phrase the modern creed; what is of immeasurable importance is that we are the Christians who have, first, to live it.

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But, approximating to homiletical values, Christian men and women may find in this challenge to living not only an obligation but a reinforcement of life. Romain Rolland has written of the "men and women who, through a dull, drab life, think grave thoughts and live in daily sacrifice."⁶ It is the common experience captured in a phrase. But this venture of life upon the truths which lie at the heart of Christianity, this staking actual life upon the data of the supernatural, brings with it at once illumination and sustaining power. From a home melodious with children's laughter and rich with domestic fellowships, one by one the sons and daughters have gone the ways of youth; and in their place is a new and inextinguishable loneliness. With the world clamoring for workmen and the products of labor, some maladjustment of industrial affairs prevents employment, and the bread-and-butter question becomes bitterly acute. After the long and arid business depression, the needless perversities of men and the injustices of events and issues still multiply, until courage and optimism and the spirit of tolerance threaten to break beneath the constant strain. Death, with the hideous imaginations it awakens, and the haunting memories it invites, and the hope-

⁶ Rolland, *Jean Christophe*, vol. ii, p. 321. Henry Holt & Company.

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lessness of grief it leaves, invades the fireside, and life walks softly with its heartbreak. These are the commonplaces. In them is the opportunity and obligation of living actually upon the truths of Christ and the Christlike God until, from the lives of multitudes who make the common Christian experience a conquering creed shall be written in terms our turbulent but questing age shall understand and accept. This means that lives thus lived in the adventure of all of them upon the theology they confess are the highways upon which God moves. It means that underneath the injustices and the machineries of industry, the disclosures of science, the social revolutions which make and distract our day, the immanent spirit of God is laboring, in the democracy of the incarnation which Christ reveals, for the world of righteousness which is to be. It means that through men's rectitude and patience in struggle, their difficulties honestly met, their loneliness with its disciplines of strength, their sorrow from which all bitterness is excluded, their endurances in which hope triumphs over resignation, God is surely accomplishing his kingdom of justice, love, and peace. In all these enterprises of renunciation, work, and purpose men are not simply the victims of the reaction of war, or participants in the

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ills to which the flesh is heir; they are laborers together with God. They are making the creed which other men will some day write and read. But it is not the creed in which they first believe; it is God.

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